ANALYZING LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS TO ENHANCE

THE USE OF AN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

by

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The following individuals read and discussed the thesis submitted by student Shelley A. Berg, and they evaluated her presentation and response to questions during the final oral examination. They found that the student passed the final oral examination.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this evaluation study was to explore how a non-profit health insurance provider responds to the results of its annual employee engagement survey. According to most definitions, an engaged employee is a high-quality performer who takes personal responsibility to work toward the success of the organization. This study was designed to answer three questions: (1) What do leaders at HealthXYZ do with the data collected from the annual employee engagement survey? (2) How do leaders perceive the usefulness of the annual employee engagement survey? (3) What actions, if any, do leaders take as a result of the data collected from the annual employee engagement survey? It is worth pointing out that this study was not intended to identify strategies for enhancing employee engagement or even to thoroughly understand the concept of engagement. Rather, the focus was to explore how the findings from the engagement survey were used and perceived by HealthXYZ leaders and why, with the ultimate goal of making recommendations to help the organization maximize the benefits of conducting this survey.

The first phase of data collection consisted of unstructured interviews with 11 division heads and 12 supervisors within HealthXYZ. The second phase of data collection consisted of an online questionnaire completed by 67 supervisors and managers, which was developed based on the analysis of the interview data.

The primary recommendation from this study is for HealthXYZ to create a comprehensive communication plan around their employee engagement initiative. Recommendations for the specific components of this communication plan are based on the findings and conclusions related to the research questions. The recommendations from this study are transferable to other organizations to help them get the most out of their organizational surveys – whether they are designed to measure engagement or another aspect of organizational health. Considering that surveys are a common tool in analyzing a performance problem or opportunity, the recommendations from this study are relevant to human performance technology (HPT) practitioners, as these recommendations can be carried out as interventions to maximize the value of an organizational survey.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Employee engagement is a workplace performance issue that has captured the attention of business leaders (Gostick & Elton, 2007; Paradise, 2008) and is credited with having a positive impact on business outcomes such as customer service, teamwork, and productivity (Catteeuw, Flynn, & Vonderhorst, 2007; Harter, Schmidt, & Keyes, 2002; Healthstream, n.d; Heger, 2007; Paradise, 2008). According to most definitions, an engaged employee is a high-quality performer who takes personal responsibility to work toward the success of the organization (Catteeuw et al., 2007; Corace, 2007; Gostick & Elton, 2007; Healthstream, n.d.; Heger, 2007; Ketter, 2008; Trahant, 2007). A common method of measuring engagement within an organization is through an annual employee engagement survey. However, conducting a survey alone will not greatly enhance engagement; actions to improve engagement must be taken in response to the survey's findings. Unfortunately, a critical pitfall of any organizational survey is often the organization's failure to act on the results (Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld, & Booth-Kewley, 1997; Wiley & Legge, 2006). But without action, employee engagement is unlikely to be enhanced and may even decrease if employees feel that their input on a survey was not taken into consideration.

Research Questions

Presented in this thesis is an evaluation study that explored how a non-profit health insurance provider in the northwestern region of the United States responds to the results of its annual employee engagement survey. For the purposes of this report, the organization studied will be referred to with the pseudonym of HealthXYZ. The purpose of this study was to explore leader perceptions and uses of the employee engagement survey findings at HealthXYZ and to make recommendations for future actions to improve the use of engagement survey results. The study was designed to answer three questions.

1. What do leaders at HealthXYZ do with the data collected from the annual employee engagement survey?
2. How do leaders at HealthXYZ perceive the usefulness of the annual employee engagement survey that is conducted throughout the organization?
3. What actions, if any, do leaders at HealthXYZ take as a result of the data collected from the annual employee engagement survey?

It is worth pointing out that this study was not intended to identify strategies for enhancing employee engagement or even to thoroughly understand the concept of engagement. Rather, the focus was to explore how the findings from the engagement survey were used and perceived by HealthXYZ leaders and why, with the ultimate goal of making recommendations to help the organization maximize the benefits of conducting this survey.

Significance of the Problem

As described earlier, engaged employees tend to be high-caliber performers who take personal responsibility for working toward the success of the organization (Catteeuw et al., 2007; Corace, 2007; Gostick & Elton, 2007; Healthstream, n.d.; Heger, 2007; Ketter, 2008; Trahant, 2007). As a result, an organization that enhances engagement within its workforce will likely experience the financial benefits produced by higher levels of quality customer service, teamwork, and productivity (Catteeuw et al., 2007; Harter et al., 2002; Healthstream, n.d; Heger, 2007; Paradise, 2008). However, in order to systematically enhance engagement, it must be measured. Conducting an employee engagement survey is a common way to measure engagement, as a well developed survey would allow a human performance technology (HPT) practitioner to identify potential areas of need that could be targeted for further analysis. Of course, in order for such a survey to function as a stepping stone to enhanced engagement, an organization must act on the results. Unfortunately, many organizations fail to act on survey results (Edwards et al., 1997; Wiley & Legge, 2006), which can actually lead to negative consequences, such as frustration, disillusionment, and distrust on the part of the employee respondents (Edwards et al., 1997; Rossett, 1999; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001).

Given the potential benefits and consequences an organization can experience by acting or not acting on an engagement survey, it was relevant to explore one organization’s use of their engagement survey in order to make recommendations for how it can be used effectively. For HealthXYZ, the results and recommendations of this study will guide them in managing their employee engagement initiative and assist them in making the engagement survey a productive step toward enhancing engagement within their workforce. On a broader scale, the recommendations from this study are transferable to other organizations to help them get the most out their organizational surveys – whether they are designed to measure engagement or another aspect of organizational health. Considering that surveys are a common tool in analyzing a performance problem or opportunity, the recommendations from this study are relevant to HPT practitioners, as these recommendations can be carried out as interventions to maximize the value of an organizational survey, increasing its usefulness as a catalyst for change when its findings are corroborated by other organizational data.

Definitions of Terms

Leaders are defined as managers and supervisors who have employees reporting to them, but do not have job titles of “director” or “division head.” The data analyzed in this study were collected in interviews with division heads and leaders and through an online questionnaire of the company’s leaders.

Employee engagement has to do with proactive efforts and commitment to an organization. An engaged employee is one who takes personal responsibility to work toward the success of the organization (Catteeuw et al., 2007; Corace, 2007; Gostick & Elton, 2007; Healthstream, n.d.; Heger, 2007; Ketter, 2008; Trahant, 2007). In this report, employee engagement is sometimes referred to simply as *engagement*.

A survey, for the purposes of this report, is a data collection instrument that consists of a set of written questions that an individual responds to in written form (adapted from Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). Survey questions do not have predetermined correct answers and are generally intended to collect data regarding respondents’ perceptions of a particular subject. An employee engagement survey is a type of survey that consists of questions that ask about aspects of employee engagement. In this report, the term *questionnaire* is synonymous with survey and used specifically to refer to the survey instrument used by the researcher for this study.

Human performance technology (HPT) is a field in which its practitioners aim to improve organizational performance. HPT practitioners do this through a systematic process of analyzing observable workplace behavior, identifying the causes of that behavior, developing and implementing solutions (referred to as *interventions*) to influence behavior in a way that will improve organizational performance, and evaluating the effectiveness of those interventions (Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger, 2004).

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Why Employee Engagement Matters

Employee engagement is viewed by many leaders as a critical indicator of successful organizational culture (Gostick & Elton, 2007). Gostick and Elton (2007), two researchers who have extensively studied employee motivation, suggest that employee engagement is a key factor in workplace motivation. They describe engaged employees as those who “give their all to achieve company goals…your above-and-beyond performers…your go-to people” (p. 82). Similarly, Corace (2007) describes engaged employees as “genuinely committed to the organization’s success and contagiously passionate about what they are doing” (p. 171). When Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development, L.L.C. was planning their initiative to connect employee engagement to business results internally, they formulated a similar definition of engagement based on their research. Their definition was also achievement-oriented and described engaged employees as those who “find smarter, more effective ways to add value” and suggested that this came about as a result of feeling valued and satisfied with their jobs and working in an environment of collaboration and trust (Catteeuw et al., 2007, p. 151). Many of the definitions of employee engagement reference both emotional and rational connections between an employee and the organization. Heger (2007) explicitly calls out these two dimensions when he defines employee engagement, explaining that emotionally engaged employees feel inspired at work, are satisfied with the accomplishment of their work, and would recommend their employer to others as a good place to work. He describes rational engagement as understanding how one's work contributes to organizational success and having the resources and support needed to do the job. Healthstream Research's (n.d.) model of employee engagement is consistent with the definitions above and is defined by four behaviors: an effort to be innovative and creative, a personal responsibility to make things happen, a desire to contribute to the success of the company, and an emotional bond to the organization. These, and other definitions in the literature (e.g., Ketter, 2008; Trahant, 2007), all tend to describe the engaged employee as one who takes personal responsibility to work toward the success of the organization.

Researchers and research organizations have generated a long list of drivers that contribute to a culture of employee engagement, such as "exciting and challenging work; having career growth and learning and development opportunities; working with great people; receiving fair pay; having supportive management; and being recognized, valued, and respected" (Ketter, 2008, p. 46). These types of themes also tend to arise in the literature on employee satisfaction, and some literature addresses employee engagement and satisfaction as a combined construct (e.g., Harter et al., 2002). However, Gostick and Elton (2007) make it a point to explain that engagement is not the same as satisfaction, as employee satisfaction is simply a measure of happiness. To illustrate the distinction between these two concepts, Gostick and Elton (2007) describe an example they encountered in their research of a mechanic at a trucking firm who was hired and paid a generous salary because of a valuable, specialized skill he possessed that was in demand at the time. Ten years later, he still receives a generous salary despite the fact that demand for his specialized skill has decreased and he is not kept very busy. The mechanic reports being quite *satisfied* with his situation, as he makes a larger salary than most in his position and takes on a relatively light workload. If his situation remains static, it is unlikely he would leave his position for another. However, he is not *engaged*; he does not strive to achieve higher levels of performance. Heger's (2007) comparison of the two concepts is similar. While he acknowledges that employee engagement includes elements of employee satisfaction, he characterizes satisfaction as being limited to employees' feelings toward their workplace, whereas engagement encompasses employees' actions. Simply put, "employee engagement is an authentic state of involvement, contribution, and ownership, which, unlike job satisfaction, is more of an active state as opposed to passive" (Healthstream, n.d., p. 1). However, Gostick and Elton (2007) and Healthstream Research (n.d.) posit that both engagement and satisfaction are critical to organizational health.

Intuitively, it makes sense that having a highly engaged workforce – a workforce full of people taking personal responsibility to work toward the success of the organization – would have a positive influence on an organization's bottom line. While the literature on this topic tends to suggest that this is the case, there is a dearth of evidence that clearly demonstrates this connection. Despite this, the business leaders surveyed by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) in 2007 tended to view employee engagement as a priority, with 46% of respondents rating employee engagement as highly important and 36% rating it as very highly important to organizational success (Paradise, 2008). When asked why engagement is important, respondents mentioned that it enhances customer service, boosts productivity, and improves teamwork and morale. Other researchers have also cited increased productivity as a benefit of having an engaged workforce (e.g., Catteeuw et al., 2007; Harter et al., 2002; Healthstream, n.d; Heger, 2007). Harter et al. (2002) attempt to connect engagement and satisfaction to business results through a meta-analysis of engagement studies conducted around the world by The Gallup Organization. When investigating turnover, they found that among high-turnover business units, those with high levels of engagement experienced an average of 29% less turnover than those with low levels of engagement. Similarly, business units with low turnover and high levels of engagement experienced an average of 10% less turnover than low-turnover business units with low levels of engagement. While they acknowledge that the financial impact of the reduced turnover depends on a variety of factors, they estimate that a business unit of 100 employees with 10% less turnover would save approximately $300,000 annually. In examining productivity in terms of monthly sales figures, Harter et al. (2002) found that highly engaged business units averaged $80,000 to $120,000 higher revenue or sales than less engaged units in a month. Considering that engagement is viewed as a critical component of organizational culture (Gostick & Elton, 2007), Harter et al.’s (2002) findings are consistent with the conclusions Kotter and Heskett (1992) present from their research – that strong organizational cultures have a powerful impact on performance. Kotter and Heskett’s (1992) research suggests that culture has a significant influence over the long-term financial performance of an organization, with “performance-degrading” cultures having a significant negative impact and more productive cultures having a positive impact (p. 11). In noting that the definition of an engaged employee includes being a proactive and high-caliber performer, it is logical that an organization that has a strong culture of engagement would enjoy a positive impact on its bottom line.

The Critical Role of Post-Survey Action

Almost all organizational surveys are a means of “providing management at various levels with a picture of an organization from which informed decisions can be made and competent interventions can be mounted” (Smith, 2003, p. 5). This statement suggests that conducting a survey is only the beginning of an initiative, while the actions that result from survey findings is really the focus of the initiative. This should certainly be true of employee engagement surveys. Regardless of what is being measured – engagement, satisfaction, or something else entirely – organizational surveys, like any other form of evaluation methods, must be managed in a systematic way in order to fully reap their benefits. The literature on survey administration highlights many of the pitfalls that organizations often stumble into with their survey initiatives. One significant pitfall is the failure of organizations to act on survey results. There are several consequences to not taking action, such as frustration, disillusionment, and distrust on the part of the employee respondents (Edwards et al., 1997; Rossett, 1999; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). These reactions not only have the potential to lower employee morale, but they can also negatively impact the response rates for future surveys, since employees may not see completing a survey as a valuable use of time if it is not going to lead to desired change. Although Edwards et al. (1997) acknowledge that some issues revealed through employee surveys cannot be solved, they recommend making the actionable results a priority, striving for quick wins, and ensuring that those accomplishments are communicated throughout the organization. In the event a decision is made not to act on a survey's results, that decision and the reasons for it should be communicated. Following this advice demonstrates the value of employees' responses and should have a positive impact on employee buy-in into surveys, and consequently, on response rates of future surveys.

Another strategy for gaining employee buy-in into organizational surveys is reporting survey results back to employees (Dunham & Smith, 1979; Edwards et al., 1997; Rossett, 1999; Smith, 2003). To support this recommendation, Edwards et al. (1997) cite reactions in a large manufacturing firm, where 84% of employees who did *not* receive survey results felt that the results would not be used well, compared to 11% of employees who *did* receive survey results and felt that the results would not be used well. Dunham and Smith (1979) posit that a discussion of survey results with employees should consist of six components: an overview of the survey and its intent, a summary of positive results, a summary of mixed results, a summary of negative results, a statement of planned actions, and an invitation to discuss what has been presented.

Another consideration in managing a survey initiative is time. One way to look at this is in terms of the timeliness of reporting survey results, as delays can decrease the meaningfulness of the results to key stakeholders (Smith, 2003). Time constraints can also affect the success of a survey initiative, as a respondent's work schedule and workload may function as deterrents for completing a survey (Smith, 2003). Edwards et al. (1997) point out the negative impact of conducting too many surveys in an organization, which tends to lead to lower response rates due to survey fatigue, especially if there is a perception that their responses will not influence desired change. Of course, respondent interest in the content of the survey also has a significant influence over response rates, and by extension, the survey's success as a source of information (Smith, 2003).

Applying Change Management Theory to Engagement Initiatives

To reiterate a key point from the previous section: "The real value of an employee survey is not in the survey itself, but in the follow-up process that translates data into action. Unfortunately, companies often fail to take the key step of using survey data to trigger change" (Wiley & Legge, 2006, p. 8). Change management theory helps explain why the disconnect between survey administration and action may occur. A multitude of change models exist, and in general, these models separate an awareness of a need to change and taking action toward change as separate steps requiring different processes (e.g., Biech, 2007; Bridges, 2003; Hiatt, 2006; Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1948; Rogers, 2003; Ulrich, 1998). These models typically outline phases through which a change initiative should progress, along with a list of tasks for successfully working through each phase. For instance, in the ADKAR model of change, Hiatt (2006) suggests that the first phase of change is *awareness*, meaning that individuals must first be aware of a need for change. This is similar to unfreezing in Lewin's (1948) change model, establishing a sense of urgency in Kotter's (1996) model, the knowledge stage in Rogers' (2003) model, and challenging the current state in Biech's (2007) model. In the context of employee engagement surveys, the findings from the survey might indicate a need for change, creating awareness among management and/or HPT practitioners.

The next phase in the ADKAR model is *desire*, which represents an individual's motivation to engage in the change. This is equivalent to activating commitment in Biech's (2007) change model, the persuasion stage in Rogers' (2003) model, and mobilizing commitment in Ulrich's (1998) model. This presents one place – transitioning from awareness to desire – where actions in response to a survey may slip through the cracks. In other words, if the results from a survey point to a need for change, that change might not be pursued if those reviewing the results do not desire the change or are not motivated to work toward the change. For employee engagement surveys specifically, this might represent a perception on the part of supervisors and managers that the status quo is good enough or that the actions needed to enhance a particular aspect of engagement would be unreasonably burdensome. This was found to be the case for some of the companies researched in Bourne, Neely, Platts, and Mills' (2002) study of 10 manufacturing firms that began to undertake an initiative related to revamping their organization's performance measures. The companies who were unsuccessful in completing the initiative cited the shear effort required as a reason for non-completion.

Continuing through Hiatt's (2006) change model, the next phase is *knowledge*, which represents having the knowledge, information, tools, processes, etc. to change. This could certainly be another point where good intentions around a survey initiative slip through the cracks. As Wiley and Legge (2006) point out, managers and supervisors simply might not know what to do with survey results or how to respond to the findings. Not knowing how to respond to the findings was a concern of leaders at Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development, L.L.C. when they undertook their employee engagement initiative; leaders asked for clarity and guidance to help them understand the concept of engagement and respond to the needs identified by the employee engagement survey (Catteeuw et al., 2007). If managers and supervisors lack access to needed information or do not have the resources to obtain needed knowledge, then a change is unlikely to occur (Hiatt, 2006). This idea is consistent with the lessons learned by researchers who have also identified access to needed subject matter expertise as a critical component of a successful change initiative (e.g., Garg & Singh, 2006; Kim, Lee, & Gosain, 2005; King & Wright, 2007).

Hiatt’s (2006) next phase could also pose a stumbling block for acting on survey results – *ability*. Here, Hiatt discusses one’s capability to implement the change, which encompasses factors such as psychological blocks, physical abilities, intellectual capability, the availability of time, and the availability of resources to support the change. In the literature reviewed for this report, a lack of time to dedicate to the change was a commonly cited barrier to successful execution (Bourne et al., 2002; Furst, 2004; Trader-Leigh, 2002; Wiley & Legge, 2006). This was an obstacle for some of the unsuccessful companies in the Bourne et al. (2002) study, in which those unsuccessful companies cited the presence of other competing initiatives (i.e., a lack of time) as an obstacle to carrying out the change. Considering the mound of responsibilities for which business leaders are accountable, it seems reasonable to suspect that this could also pose a stumbling block to taking actions to enhance employee engagement.

Reinforcement is the final phase of Hiatt’s (2006) change model, which refers to the actions needed to make a change sustainable. This idea functions as a final phase in many of the change models in the literature on change (e.g., Biech, 2007; Bridges, 2003; Kotter, 1996; Rogers, 2003; Ulrich, 1998). Reinforcement includes factors such as recognizing relevant accomplishments, removing barriers/consequences to adapting to the change, and building systems of accountability. Applying this phase to an employee engagement survey would likely mean taking steps to ensure that a concern for engagement becomes ingrained into an organization's culture, as opposed to it being something that managers think about once a year when the survey is administered.

Aside from consciously working through phases of a change initiative, the research on change suggests that certain elements should be in place throughout the initiative to increase the likelihood of success, as an absence of these elements can become a considerable barrier to change. A few examples of such elements include a well-crafted communication strategy regarding the change (Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts, & Walker, 2007; Biech, 2007; Bridges, 2003; Garg & Singh, 2006; Hiatt, 2006; Huq, 2005; Rogers, 2003), availability of time to dedicate to change-related efforts (Bridges, 2003; Bourne et al., 2002; Trader-Leigh, 2002), active sponsorship of top management (Armenakis et al., 2007; Biech, 2007; Bridges, 2003; Furst, 2004; Garg & Singh, 2006; Hiatt, 2006; Kim et al., 2005; King & Wright, 2007), an understanding among those affected around how the change will benefit them (Armenakis et al., 2007; Biech, 2007; Bourne et al., 2002; Bridges, 2003; Furst, 2004; Kotter, 1996; Rogers, 2003; Trader-Leigh, 2002), the support of opinion-leaders throughout the organization (Rogers, 2003), and compatibility of the change to the organization and its culture (Biech, 2007; Bridges, 2003; Hiatt, 2006; Huq, 2005; Rogers, 2003; Trader-Leigh, 2002). Acting on the findings of an employee engagement survey would require all of these elements to be in place to ensure that the usefulness of such a survey is maximized throughout the organization.

Enhancing employee engagement is a process that requires planning and management. In order to avail of the benefits of an engaged workforce – such as improved organizational health (Gostick & Elton, 2007; Healthstream, n.d.) and business outcomes (Catteeuw et al., 2007; Harter et al., 2002; Healthstream, n.d.; Heger, 2007; Paradise, 2008) – it is critical that a change management strategy is part of the equation. As emphasized earlier, simply conducting a survey is not enough to activate change – a change management strategy that incorporates the major phases and other key elements of successful change must guide the process of enhancing employee engagement.

Connecting Engagement to Human Performance Technology

According to Paradise (2008), "Many organizations have started to rely heavily on the learning function for engagement support. As a result, employee engagement has become a salient topic for many workplace learning and performance professionals" (p. 54). As explained previously, there are a variety of factors that influence an individual's level of engagement. Some of these factors might be considered inherent in a particular individual's character, while many of them have to do with the workplace itself. Either way, employee engagement can be enhanced through the application of appropriate interventions intended to influence attitude and behavior. Kamradt and Kamradt (1999) posit that such attitudinal interventions can be successful if they address the three components of attitude – affective, cognitive, and behavioral – by creating experiences that shift these three components together in the same direction. If engagement is viewed as a critical element of organizational culture (Gostick & Elton, 2007), then research suggests that that carefully selected and implemented interventions can be applied to move it in a more productive direction (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Considering that the aim of measuring and enhancing employee engagement is improved business outcomes (Catteeuw et al., 2007; Harter et al., 2002; Healthstream, n.d; Heger, 2007; Paradise, 2008), an active response to an employee engagement survey can be a powerful systemic approach to organizational development.

The process of successfully deploying an employee engagement initiative follows the HPT model (Van Tiem, Moseley, & Dessinger, 2004) as well as other models that are central to the field of HPT. The HPT model, displayed in Figure 1, begins with performance analysis, which is the phase in which an employee engagement survey would likely take place. The findings of the survey may also feed into the next piece of the model, cause analysis, as the findings related to specific questions may reveal the causes for the level of engagement that exists. Of course, it would still be prudent to corroborate these findings with findings from other data sources. The next two pieces – intervention selection, design, and development; and intervention implementation and change – represent the critical action-oriented portions of an initiative that too often fall through the cracks after survey administration (Edwards et al, 1997; Wiley & Legge, 2006). As with any initiative, the evaluation piece of the HPT model is key to ensuring that the actions taken in response to the survey are delivering the desired results.

The HPT model can be viewed as a guide for continuous organizational improvement, and employee engagement surveys can be a means to that improvement. To reap the benefits of an engagement survey, leaders must act on its findings and implement desired change in order to successfully improve performance. The intention of this study was to examine how leaders of HealthXYZ use their engagement survey as a means to increase organizational success and identify ways they can use the survey findings to further improve performance.

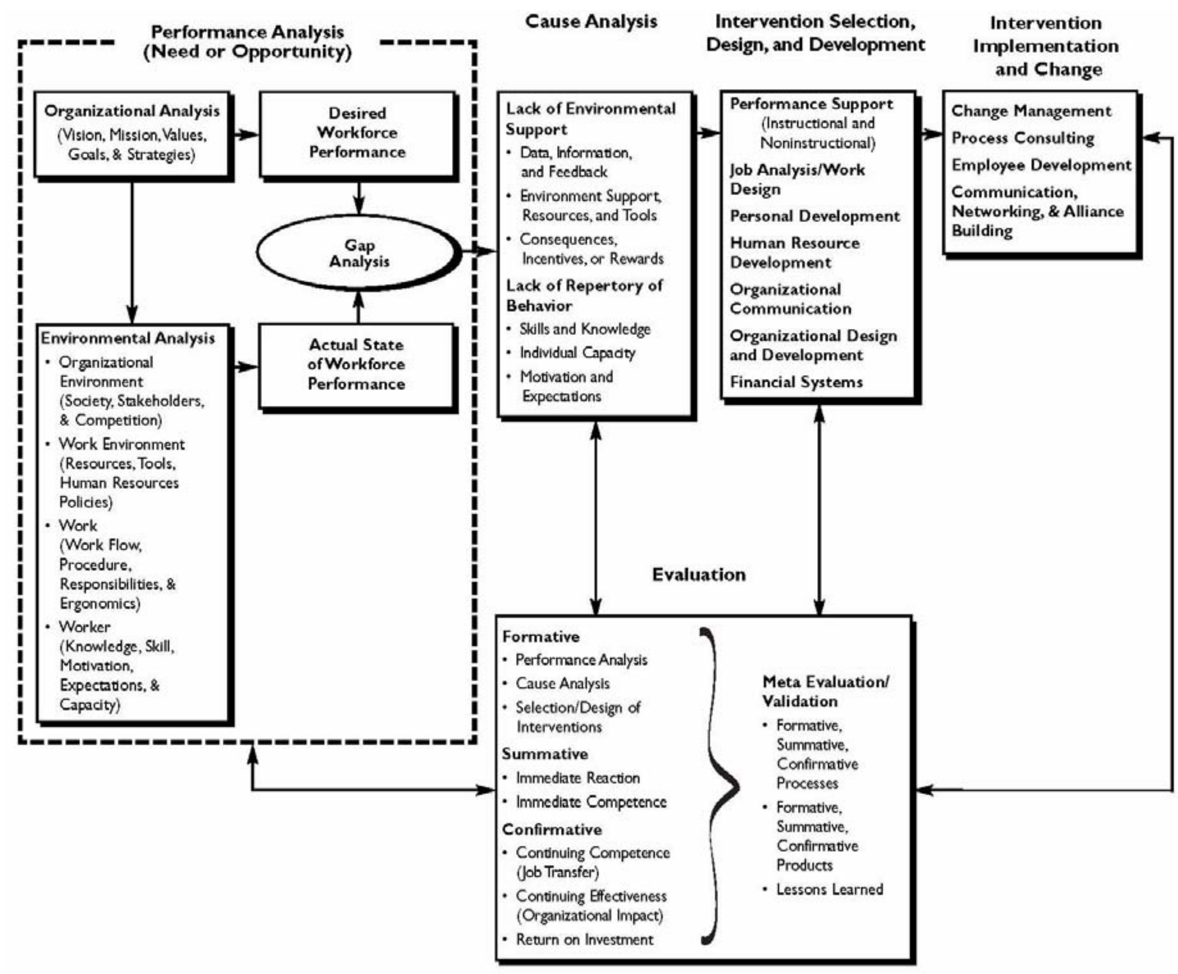

Figure 1. Human performance technology (HPT) model.

Note. Reprinted with permission. Copyright 2004. The International Society for Performance Improvement HPT model is from page 3 of *Fundamentals of Performance Technology*, Second Edition by D.M. Van Tiem, J.L. Moseley, and J.C. Dessinger. All rights reserved.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore leader perceptions and uses of the annual employee engagement survey findings at HealthXYZ and to make recommendations for future actions to improve the use of engagement survey results. This study was designed to answer three questions.

1. What do leaders at HealthXYZ do with the data collected from the annual employee engagement survey?
2. How do leaders at HealthXYZ perceive the usefulness of the annual employee engagement survey that is conducted throughout the organization?
3. What actions, if any, do leaders at HealthXYZ take as a result of the data collected from the annual employee engagement survey?

Participants

The target population for this study was leaders (supervisors and managers) at HealthXYZ, a non-profit health insurance provider, located in the northwest region of the United States, consisting of approximately 6,000 employees. The target population had 568 people at the start of data collection in January 2008; there were 231 with manager titles and 337 with supervisor titles. A sample of 79 leaders participated in this study; detailed information about the sample is described in the following section.

Data was also collected from HealthXYZ division heads for this study, despite the fact that these individuals were not defined as part of the target population of leaders. It is the responsibility of division heads to communicate engagement results down through the levels of their divisions; therefore, data was collected from this group in order to better understand the flow of communication about the engagement survey through the organization, which could potentially lead to a better understanding of leaders' perceptions of the engagement survey.

Instruments and Procedures

Two major phases of data collection took place for this study. The first phase was exploratory and consisted of unstructured interviews. The second phase consisted of an online survey, the questionnaire of which was developed based on the data collected from the earlier interviews.

Phase 1 Data Collection: Unstructured, Exploratory Interviews

The first phase of data collection consisted of unstructured, exploratory interviews. A total of 23 interviews took place, all by phone, lasting up to 45 minutes each. Two types of respondents were interviewed: division heads and supervisors. All interviewees received an invitation via email from an internal representative within HealthXYZ inviting them to participate. Copies of these email invitations can be found in Appendix A and Appendix B.

HealthXYZ is divided into 12 business divisions. All 12 of HealthXYZ's division heads were invited to participate in interviews, and 11 participated in February 2008 (one was on medical leave and unavailable to participate). Three division heads were female and eight were male. No other demographic data were collected about these participants. The division heads are the first to receive their division's results from the employee engagement survey from human resources (HR); it is then up to the division heads to diffuse the information provided by HR throughout their divisions. Therefore, the purpose of interviewing this group of participants was to understand how this communication process begins and potentially draw some connections between the actions and perspectives of the division heads to those of the target population. These unstructured interviews each lasted up to 45 minutes and were guided by the questions listed below, each of which is based on one or more of the study's main research questions.

- After receiving the results of the employee engagement survey from HR, what do you do with that information?
- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being not valuable and 10 being extremely valuable, to what extent do you feel like conducting the employee engagement survey is a valuable activity for your division?
- How have you or your division benefited from the employee engagement survey?
- What could be done to make the employee engagement survey and its results more beneficial for you and those in your division?

The probing questions posed throughout these interviews were in line with the types of typical probes recommended by Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) and Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001), such as repeating responses in a questioning way, asking for elaboration, requesting clarification on conflicting statements, asking for opinions, and asking about the meaning of jargon used by the respondent.

Unstructured interviews were conducted with 12 supervisors in late February and early March 2008. A purposive sampling procedure was used to ensure that those interviewed consisted of one interviewee from each division, six males and six females, and a representative distribution of tenures in position and numbers of employees reporting to them. For sampling purposes, supervisors who had been in their positions for less than one year were excluded from the pool of potential interviewees, as they may lack the first-hand experience with the employee engagement survey that would be necessary to answer the interview questions. The tenures of the remaining supervisors were divided into quartiles (see Table 1), so that interviewees could be selected from each quartile and an array of tenures would be represented in the interviewee sample. Additionally, supervisors with fewer than five employees reporting to them were also excluded from the pool of potential interviewees, as it was thought that those with very few direct reports may not view the engagement survey as being as relevant to them as to the rest of the population. For the remaining supervisors, the number of direct reports was divided into quartiles (see Table 1), so that interviewees could be selected from each quartile and an array of team sizes would be represented in the interviewee sample. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the supervisors who participated in these interviews. All 12 supervisors who were invited to participate opted in. The questions that guided the unstructured interviews with the supervisors are below. As above, these questions were written following the main research questions.

- How are the results of the employee engagement survey for your department communicated to you?
- What do you do with that information?
- On a scale of 1-10, 1 being not valuable and 10 being extremely valuable, to what extent do you feel like conducting the employee engagement survey is a valuable activity?
- How have you or your department benefited from the employee engagement survey?
- What could be done to make the employee engagement survey and its results more beneficial for you?

The probing questions posed throughout these interviews were in line with the types of typical probes recommended by Schensul et al. (1999) and Russ-Eft and Preskill (2001), as described above.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Supervisors who Participated in Interviews

No. of Direct Reports (in employees)	Tenure in Position (in years)			
	Quartile 1 (1-1.64)	Quartile 2 (1.64-2.38)	Quartile 3 (2.39-3.66)	Quartile 4 (3.67-10.05)
Quartile 1 (5-8)	Division 7 Male	Division 1 Male	Division 11 Female	Division 5 Female
Quartile 2 (9-12)		Division 4 Male	Division 9 Male	
Quartile 3 (13-15)	Division 3 Female	Division 12 Female	Division 6 Male	
Quartile 4 (16-37)	Division 10 Female	Division 8 Female		Division 2 Male

Interview data were inductively analyzed by following the procedure recommended by LeCompte and Schensul (1999), which involves progressing through three levels of analysis – item level, pattern level, and structure level. Item level analysis involves reviewing data to identify data units that relate to the research questions. These units tend to be in the form of statements that are noteworthy because they occur frequently, relate to other data units, or are influential. In this study, such data units were identified by highlighting relevant statements in the interview transcripts and assigning each a code. Each transcript was reviewed several times for item level analysis. Pattern level analysis involves identifying linkages between data units and grouping them into domains, and structure level analysis involves identifying relationships between domains. The technique of systematically analyzing units for similarities and differences, described by Ryan and Bernard (2003), was used heavily in this study for this portion of analysis. The pattern and structure levels of analysis were executed in this study by copying data units from interview transcripts into a Microsoft Excel workbook in which individual spreadsheets (i.e., tabs) were associated with domains. Data units were organized within each spreadsheet to represent potential relationships between them.

Phase 2 Data Collection: Online Questionnaire

The second phase of data collection consisted of an online questionnaire, which was constructed by converting data units and domains from the analysis of interview data into variables and factors to be measured on the questionnaire. Schensul et al. (1999) suggest that this ethnographic sequence of data collection can function to determine the extent to which findings from interviews can be transferred to a population and identify relationships between variables that were uncovered in interviews.

For two weeks in late April and early May 2008, the online questionnaire was conducted with a sample of HealthXYZ leaders. The initial plan was to invite the entire population to take the questionnaire. In April, the plan was amended to restrict the questionnaire to a sample of 40% of the population, based on a request from HealthXYZ division heads. This request was based on an unexpected increase in workload in a large portion of the organization due to a troubled information technology initiative and a desire to limit the employee time spent on completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire sample included only supervisors and managers who had been in their current positions at least one year and had at least five direct reports. From this group, a random sample of 40% of leaders from each division was invited to take the online questionnaire. The random selection was conducted by assigning each member of the target population a number and using the random number feature in Microsoft Excel to select participants. Participants were invited to participate via an email invitation, which is in Appendix C. Of the 130 leaders invited, 67 (51.5%) agreed to participate. Of these respondents, 48 (71.6%) were “supervisors” and 16 (28.4%) were “managers.” Table 2 displays the response rate by division. No other demographic data were collected, as providing this additional data could have decreased the sense of anonymity for respondents from smaller divisions.

Table 2

Questionnaire Response Rates by Division

Division	Actual Respondents	Percent of Total Respondents (%)	Number of Invited Leaders	Response Rate for Division (%)
Customer Service	39	58.2	77	50.7
Health Care Support	6	9.0	11	51.5
Technology	4	6.0	10	40.0
Sales Group 1	4	6.0	5	80.0
Finance	3	4.5	10	10.0
Marketing	3	4.5	3	100.0
Sales Group 2	3	4.5	2	150.0[a]
Corporate Services	2	3.0	5	40.0
Sales Group 3	2	3.0	2	100.0
Sales Group 4	2	3.0	2	100.0
Project Management	1	1.5	2	50.0
Internal Audit	0	0.0	1	0.0
TOTAL	67	100.0	130	51.5

[a] Although only two leaders were invited to participate from Sales Group 2, three respondents indicated that they were in this division.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANLAYSIS AND RESULTS

Interview data were inductively analyzed by following the procedure recommended by LeCompte and Schensul (1999), which involves progressing through three levels of analysis – item level, pattern level, and structure level – as indicated above. The findings from this analysis were then translated into questions for the questionnaire. Questionnaire data were analyzed using *SPSS 14.0 for Windows Student Version.* The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix D. The following is a synthesis of the findings from the interviews and questionnaire.

What Leaders Do with Engagement Survey Data

Before leaders can do anything with the employee engagement survey data, it must be communicated to them by their division heads and/or direct managers. After receiving this data, two possible next steps reported by leaders include analyzing the survey data themselves and communicating survey results to their own employees. The results related to these activities are reported in this section.

Communication of Engagement Survey Results to Leaders

All 11 of the division heads interviewed stated that they communicate the survey results to their direct reports in team meetings. Table 3 summarizes how leaders reported receiving the survey results from their direct managers. Table 3 also lists the average rating of leaders' perceived usefulness of the engagement survey (question 9 on this study's questionnaire) by how survey results were communicated to them.

Table 3

Methods Used by Managers to Communicate Survey Results to Leaders

How Results Communicated	No. of Leader Interview Respondents (*N* = 12)	No. of Leader Questionnaire Respondents (*N* = 67)	Average Rating of Engagement Survey Usefulness by Leader Questionnaire Respondents (*N* = 50)
Email only	4 (33.3%)	32 (47.8%)	4.1
Email & Meeting	4 (33.3%)	2 (3.0%)	5.0
Email & Meeting & One-on-one	1 (8.3%)	7 (10.4%)	5.8
Email & One-on-one	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.0%)	5.0
Meeting only	2 (16.7%)	5 (7.5%)	5.2
Meeting & One-on-one	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.5%)	6.0
One-on-one only	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.5%)	5.0
Not communicated	1 (8.3%)	17 (25.4%)	N/A

Questionnaire respondents who received communication of survey results by email only had the lowest average rating of perceived engagement survey usefulness, at 4.1 (on a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 = "not valuable at all;" 7 = "extremely valuable"). In contrast, those who received communication of survey results by two forms of personal contact (i.e., meeting and one-on-one conversation with boss) had the highest average rating of engagement survey usefulness, at 5.9 (which represents the average of ratings from respondents in two categories from the table above: "Email & Meeting & One-on-one" and "Meeting & One-on-one"). There is no average rating of engagement survey usefulness for leaders who do not receive communication of survey results, as these respondents were directed not to finish completing the questionnaire.

Leader Analysis of Engagement Survey Results

When asked in interviews what they do with the engagement survey results after those results are communicated to them, leaders offered the following comments in regards to their own analysis of the data.

- 5 interviewees analyze the engagement survey results independently
- 3 interviewees skim through the engagement survey results
- 4 interviewees do not see raw numbers from the results and are unable to analyze them

It is worth noting that 10 of the interviewees mentioned that they do not receive results that are isolated to their own team of direct reports.

On question 4 of the questionnaire, leaders were asked to rate the extent they analyze the engagement survey data themselves to develop their own conclusions (1 = "I do not review the data at all;" 4 = "I briefly review the data;" 7 = "I dedicate time to review all the data and analyze trends"). Overall, there was a tendency of leaders to dedicate time to analyzing the data themselves. The mean was 5.39 and the distribution of responses is illustrated in Figure 2.

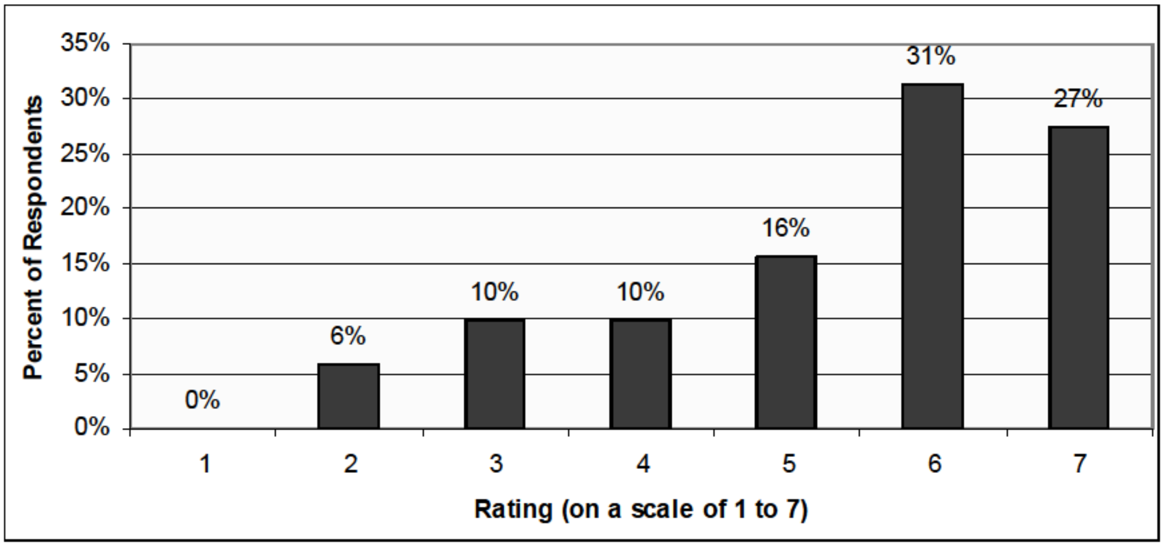

Figure 2. Extent to which leaders analyze the engagement survey data themselves to develop their own conclusions ($N = 51$).

A Spearman's *rho* test was conducted between the two variables below, which consisted of nonparametric data.

- Extent to which leaders analyze engagement survey data (question 4 on the questionnaire)
- Extent to which leaders agree that the engagement survey is a valuable tool (question 9 on the questionnaire)

There was a positive correlation between the variables at a significant level, but it was not a strong correlation ($r_s(50) = .28$, $p < .05$), indicating that leaders who analyze engagement survey data to a greater extent tend to perceive the survey as a valuable tool to a slightly greater degree (than those who analyze the data to a lesser extent). This finding is illustrated in Figure 3.

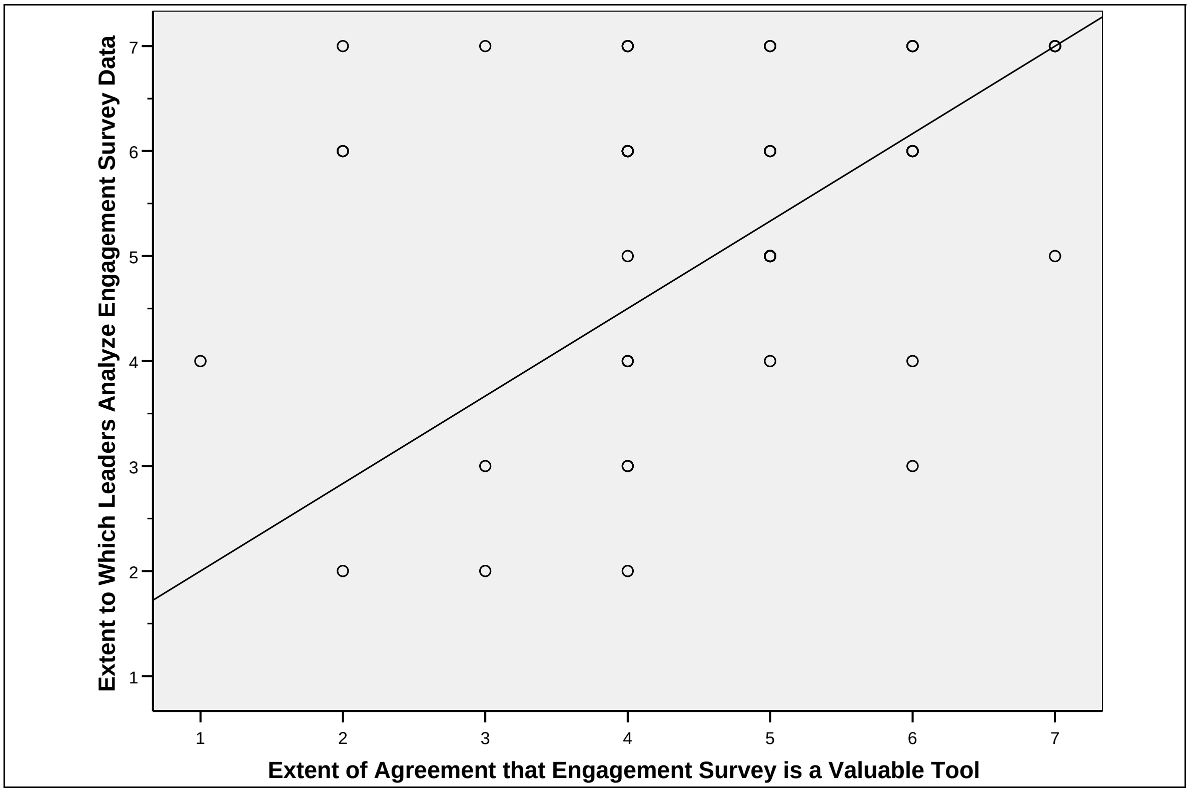

Figure 3. Extent leaders analyze engagement survey data versus extent of agreement that engagement survey is a valuable tool.

Communication of Engagement Survey Results to Employees

Approximately two-thirds of leaders indicated that they share the results of the engagement survey with their direct reports.

- In interviews, 8 (66.67%) leaders indicated that they share the results of the engagement survey with their direct reports.
- On question 6 of the questionnaire, 46 (68.66%) leaders reported sharing the results of the engagement survey with their direct reports.

Below are examples of comments made by leaders in interviews about the value of sharing engagement survey results with direct reports.

- We talk about our commitment to HealthXYZ and our unique opportunity to drive the mission and influence changes in the organization. We also compare HealthXYZ culture and the environment to that of other organizations, you know – their past employers. It reinforces that it's not that bad here, which is good. I try to work current department goals and plans into survey results and my discussion about it with employees.
- It's nice for staff to know how things are going division-wide. Sharing results with my staff builds trust. I use the survey results as a discussion tool in staff meetings. No ideas are exchanged – we just talk about survey's confidentiality.
- The only benefit to the survey I see is that it sparks discussion with my employees.
- They suggest why the results are as they are. They don't bring up concrete ideas. It's not a useful activity for me.

Question 6 on the questionnaire asked respondents to rate the extent to which discussing the results of the engagement survey with direct reports is a valuable activity (1 = “not valuable at all;” 7 = “extremely valuable”). The mean was 4.57, and the distribution of ratings is provided in Figure 4.

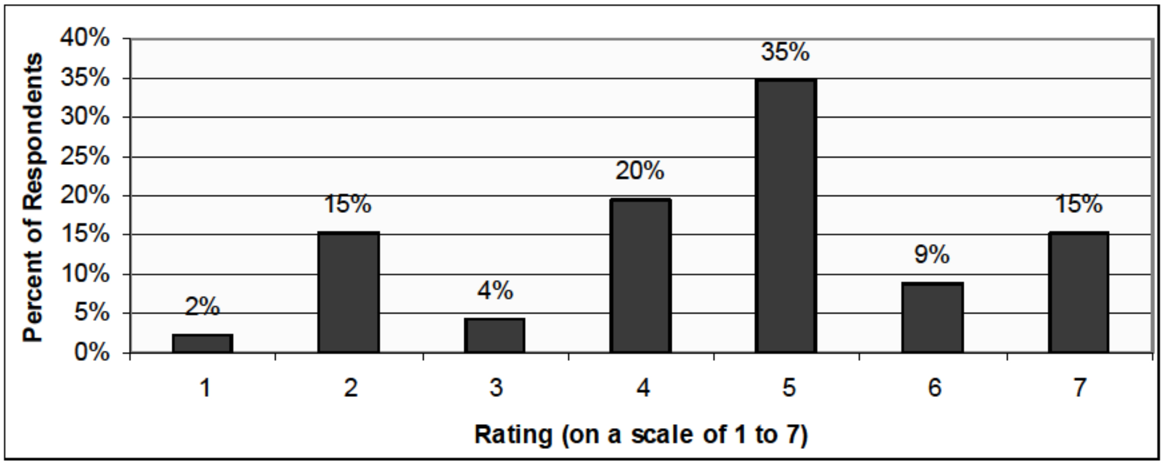

Figure 4. Extent to which discussing the results of the engagement survey with direct reports is a valuable activity ($N = 46$).

Perceptions of the Engagement Survey

In studying the perceptions of the engagement survey, leaders were asked about the survey's benefits, barriers to use, and overall value. Exploration of these topics also revealed ideas for improving the engagement survey process.

Benefits of the Engagement Survey

In interviews, division heads and leaders were asked to identify the benefits they have seen from the engagement survey. Table 4 lists the types of benefits that were mentioned by division heads in interviews. Table 5 lists the types of benefits that were mentioned by leaders in interviews.

Table 4

Benefits of Engagement Survey Reported by Division Head Interviewees

Type of Benefit	No. of Mentions	Sample Comments from Division Heads
Results give me a read on how my division is doing with engagement	7	▪ It gives you a read on your employees' commitment. This is important, because agreement isn't the same as commitment. Agreement is observable when people just go along with something. This measures commitment. ▪ The engagement survey captures the sentiment of all the employees in the division. I don't know them all personally.
Results complement other methods to gauge engagement	6	▪ The survey by itself isn't that valuable, but it corroborates other information. ▪ The survey is just one read on the division. I can also get a read through communication and feedback in other forms. Sometimes we get a sense we need improvement in an area, and the survey confirms that.
We have implemented improvements as a direct result of the survey results	6	▪ We've made specific changes in our division around staff retention efforts and clarifying manager expectations around communication. ▪ We incorporated improvement ideas into our annual objectives and development plans. We also designed onboarding activities directed toward engagement.
Survey offers educational value about engagement	5	▪ The engagement survey creates an opportunity for a common lexicon across the organization around engagement. It's important to have a common understanding across the board. ▪ Having the survey reminds us of the things we should be doing anyway. The most valuable activity that comes out of the survey is communication around engagement, why it's important, and how to make it happen.
Results validate what we’re already doing	3	▪ The survey results validate the success of engagement activities we've done in the past. ▪ The survey results reinforce the good things we're trying to do anyway. It shows our activities have value.

Table 5

Benefits of Engagement Survey Reported by Leader Interviewees

Type of Benefit	No. of Mentions	Sample Comments from Leaders
Benefits are primarily at the organizational level (rather than the team level)	7	▪ The survey isn't very valuable for my team, but it gives a sense of the company culture and how people feel the company treats its employees. I think attempting to measure engagement is a good thing for the company. ▪ It could be used better throughout the groups of the company, but I think it's an important tool for the business to see where everyone's at. They should be measuring this. ▪ Its only benefit is to understand the big picture of employee engagement for the company. So it's good for HR and maybe the higher ups to make larger policy changes maybe.
I have implemented improvements as a direct result of the survey results	3	▪ In response to the survey, we did our own follow-up surveys around how employees prefer to receive recognition and feedback. ▪ If areas are rated low, then we ask our employees about those areas in meetings and in one-on-one conversations so we can figure out what we need to do.
The survey has employee awareness benefits	3	▪ If anything, the survey gets them thinking about their jobs more and their level of happiness. ▪ It's nice for staff to know how things are going division-wide. Sharing results with my staff builds trust.
The survey reinforces things I’m doing anyway	2	▪ [after describing things already being done regarding engagement] It highlights for me that I should continue doing that. ▪ Good scores on the survey tell me that what I’m doing is working.

Question 7 on the questionnaire asked leaders to rate the extent to which they agreed that each item listed in that question is a benefit of the engagement survey (1 =

"strongly disagree;" 7 = "strongly agree"). The higher the rating an item received, the greater the extent that it was perceived as a benefit. The results for each item are found in Table 6.

Table 6

Leader Ratings of Engagement Survey Benefits on the Questionnaire (*N* = 50)

Item	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
a. It has helped me to better understand the concept of employee engagement.	2	7	4.56	1.33
b. It helps me to gauge the level of engagement on my team of direct reports.	2	7	4.68	1.32
c. It helps me to identify existing strengths and opportunities for improvement within my team.	2	7	4.60	1.43
d. It helps me to identify actions I can take to strengthen engagement within my team.	2	7	4.60	1.58
e. It helps me to be more sensitive to employee engagement issues.	2	7	4.90	1.31
f. It validates the effectiveness of engagement-oriented activities I'm already doing.	1	7	4.56	1.39
g. It prompts discussion between my direct reports and me.	1	7	4.48	1.62
h. Discussions about the survey's results strengthen employees' commitment to HealthXYZ.	1	7	4.12	1.47
i. The survey results allow me to see how my team's engagement compares to that of HealthXYZ as a whole.	2	7	4.90	1.22
j. The survey results help management to gauge the level of engagement for HealthXYZ as a whole.	2	7	4.96	1.25
k. The survey results help management to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement for HealthXYZ as a whole.	2	7	4.96	1.29
l. The survey results help management to identify actions that they can take to strengthen engagement for HealthXYZ as a whole.	2	7	4.82	1.32
m. Positive changes have been implemented at HealthXYZ because of the employee engagement survey and its results.	2	7	4.44	1.51
n. The survey results help HealthXYZ to achieve its objectives as a company.	2	7	4.64	1.27

Barriers and Suggested Improvement for Using the Engagement Survey

In interviews, division heads and leaders were asked to identify potential opportunities for improvement for reporting the engagement survey results. These discussions often resulted in interviewees listing factors (i.e., barriers) that made it difficult for them to fully utilize the engagement survey results to implement positive change. Table 7 lists the types of barriers to using the engagement survey that were mentioned by division heads. Table 8 lists the types of barriers to using the engagement survey results that were mentioned by leaders in interviews.

Table 7

Barriers Reported by Division Heads to Using Engagement Survey Results

Type of Barrier	No. of Mentions	Sample Comments from Division Heads
Lack of "actionable" suggestions with the survey results	8	▪ Don't say we should do "X" better without telling us how. We should be provided with proven methods to improve scores, methods that are researched and have worked for others, not just a guess. ▪ I would love a package that includes analysis of my division and where's the low hanging fruit. Where's the bang for my buck to increase satisfaction? What can I actually do? ▪ It would be nice if something said - "if you want to improve X, here's a list of activities to consider."
Survey data is difficult to obtain	4	▪ My area's data is logistically hard to get a hold of; there's lot of hoops to jump through and then a lot of waiting. ▪ It seems to take a long time for the results to be communicated to us. That gap lessens the value of the scores because of all the activities going on in the organization in between.

Table 7 (cont.)

Type of Barrier	No. of Mentions	Sample Comments from Division Heads
Inaccurate response rates (some areas have a response rate of over 100%)	2	▪ The numbers this year are inaccurate (over 100% response rate for the division). This indicates to me that they are all wrong in all areas. It makes the results not valuable at all. ▪ The response level is inaccurate (over 100% response rate for the division), and that diminishes the value of the report. It's hard to do something with it.
Lack of statistical significance	2	▪ One problem with the data - I have some smaller employee groups in my division. With partial response rates, the statistical analysis isn't very robust. I have to figure out what's real and what's a blip in the data. ▪ It would be nice if statistical significance was reported for year to year changes. Otherwise, we may be celebrating victories where the increase wasn't significant, and we might be getting upset over areas that didn't decrease by a significant amount. Saying an area went up or down isn't enough to go off of.
Miscellaneous comments	N/A	▪ I haven't done much with the results because of more pressing demands. There's just so many other things to do. I haven't spent the time to talk about things we could do to improve scores. ▪ Sometimes I feel data overload; I don’t know where to begin with the results. ▪ I do my own analysis of the data to some extent, but it's hard to do. I mainly look at high level data. There's a lot of information - I don't know how to take advantage of all of it. ▪ The data would be more helpful if we could get results about smaller groups. It's hard to act on in such large blocks. It's not as valuable without the smaller group breakdowns because you can't pinpoint where problems exist.

Table 8

Barriers Reported by Leaders to Using Engagement Survey Results

Type of Barrier	No. of Mentions	Sample Comments from Leaders
Lack of belief that the survey really makes a difference	7	▪ I don't have a lot of faith in these surveys. They're usually not used to make changes. But that's baggage I bring from past jobs. If I saw results of the survey tied to changes in the company, I'd take more interest. ▪ I think the idea of the survey seems nice, but I'm not sure that it has an effect on anything. ▪ It seems like the survey has a lot of potential and could be used better, but it doesn't seem like we're doing anything with it right now. It's hard to tell employees why they should do it if we're not doing anything with it.
Survey results not provided in a timely fashion	4	▪ It would be easier to do something with the results if they were more timely. A lot can change in a few months, so it can be hard to relate to. ▪ There's a significant lag time between the survey being conducted and getting the results, which deceases its value because a lot can change in that time.
Survey results not drilled down to “team” level	4	▪ The data isn't useful for me because it's not specific to my team. Maybe it would be if it was for my team. ▪ I don't know how the survey could function as a gauge when I don't get results at the team level. I look at personal interactions.
We get lots of surveys	3	▪ We're a busy company, so there's a lot of surveys coming through. It's overwhelming and time-consuming. ▪ We get lots of surveys and employees are sometimes annoyed with having to spend time on another survey.

Question 8 on the questionnaire asked leaders to rate the extent to which they agreed that each item listed in that question makes it difficult for them to use the results of the engagement survey (1 = "strongly disagree;" 7 = "strongly agree"). The lower the rating an item received, the less it was perceived as a barrier to using the survey results. The results for items in this question are listed in Table 9.

Table 9

Leader Ratings of Engagement Survey Barriers on the Questionnaire (*N* = 50)

Item	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
a. It is difficult to use the survey results because I do not receive results that are specific to my direct reports.	1	7	3.53	2.24
b. It is difficult to use the survey results because I do not see raw numbers from the survey results.	1	7	3.56	1.98
c. It is difficult to use the survey results because it is not a useful tool for gauging engagement on my team.	1	7	3.58	1.92
d. It is difficult to use the survey results because I am not held accountable for taking action.	1	7	2.58	1.76
e. It is difficult to use the survey results because I am not sure what actions to take to strengthen engagement on my team.	1	7	3.39	1.76
f. It is difficult to use the survey results because I am not sure how to take advantage of the survey and its results.	1	7	3.50	1.83
g. It is difficult to use the survey results because the scores for my team are good; therefore I do not need to take action.	1	7	2.86	1.42
h. It is difficult to use the survey results because we get too many surveys.	1	7	3.83	2.12
i. It is difficult to use the survey results because I do not receive results timely enough to be meaningful.	1	7	3.28	1.75
j. It is difficult to use the survey results because I see the survey as being more of a tool for the organization as a whole than for me.	1	7	3.81	1.83
k. It is difficult to use the survey results because I don't think others are using the results to make changes.	1	7	3.69	1.51

Leader comments in the open comments field on the questionnaire introduced an additional perceived barrier, which did not emerge in earlier interviews – a lack of confidence that the engagement survey results truly reflect their team's overall level of engagement. Below are some of the comments that point to this on the questionnaire.

- Unfortunately, I'm not sure that the results of the survey really show what the employee is feeling "overall" just what they are feeling at that time. If they are particularly disgruntled about a change in policy or procedure, that is reflected negatively on the survey. This type of information is hard to know what to do with because most times it does not directly involve a decision I've made, but a corporate one.
- Surveys are subject to current moods - if someone is having a bad day, the survey results won't ring true for the average levels of engagement. As I write this, it's a very busy Monday and reviews are a front burner focus for me.
- It really depends on what is going on within the company/team at the time the survey is sent out, to what the result are going to be. For example: high inventories, requiring mandatory overtime. Changing to a new system and having a lot of system problems causing inventories to climb. Having a parking situation. Employee in counseling. All of these will and have caused the results of the survey to be lower.
- What I find difficult is that one person can skew the results for the entire survey. If you have done a discipline action for an employee, they can rate you as a 1 all the way across and this is not fair. They do not leave comments so it makes it hard

to correct whatever it is that you are doing wrong. Also, with as much shifting that goes on in claims, it is not always accurate for the employees that you have.

- My biggest challenge with the engagement survey is; when the results come in to us as managers it is 7-8 months later. So many things can change in 7-8 months that the results may no longer valid for smaller departments.

Another issue that was raised in questionnaire comments is the inability of supervisors to have an impact on something that is being criticized on the engagement survey by their employees. This theme appears to correspond with the perception described earlier that the survey's benefits are primarily at the organizational (rather than team) level. Comments from the questionnaire in this direction are below.

- Most of the time the comments are not something you can really do anything about. But they are still good to hear!
- Most of the feedback given on these surveys are issues that the supervisor has no control of. It is hard to take these comments to heart when it is about location wage differences, pay, performance requirements are too harsh. If we can't do anything about them it is hard to use this survey to help our employees.
- The survey is just a source of frustration with my unit. They come up with great suggestions for improvements to the system and ways to make our jobs easier. However they require a service request which they know will never get worked on. They have very strong feelings about our quality in-line program in that they know it is not a statistically valid reflection of their work. The program has been changed so that if they receive one error a month they receive a failing score. These are the types of things that are outside my control.

<u>Overall Perceptions of Usefulness of the Engagement Survey Results</u>

In interviews, division heads were asked to rate the value of the engagement survey on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = low; 10 = high). The ratings ranged from 6 to 9, with a mean rating of 7.41 for all division heads interviewed. Leaders were asked the same question in interviews; ratings ranged from 1 to 10, with a mean rating of 5.68 for all leaders interviewed. The relationship between a rating given by a division head and the rating given by the leader in that same division was not examined, as the range of ratings provided by the division heads was too narrow for analysis.

On the questionnaire, leaders were asked to rate the extent to which they agree that the employee engagement survey is a useful tool on a scale of 1 to 7 (1 = "not valuable at all;" 7 = "extremely valuable"). Note that the scale used on the survey differs from the scale used in interviews, so a direct comparison was not made. The mean response to this item on the survey was 4.58. The distribution of responses is illustrated in Figure 5.

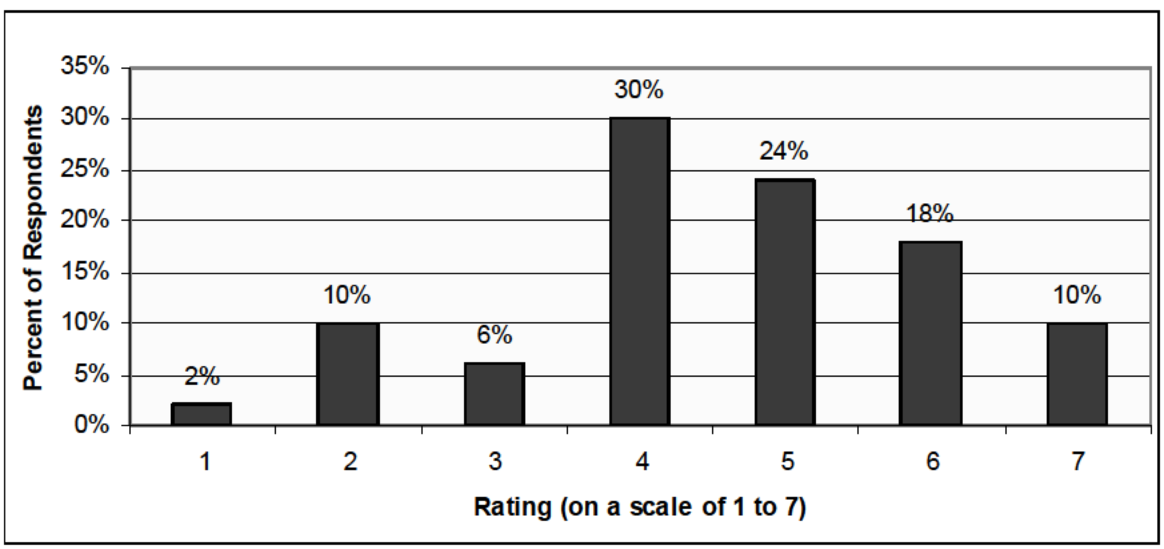

Figure 5. Extent that engagement survey is a valuable tool ($N = 50$).

According to a Mann-Whitney *U*-test, which was selected due to the nonparametric nature of the data, there was not a statistically significant difference in ratings of the engagement survey as a valuable tool between supervisors (M = 4.50, SD = 1.54, N = 48) and managers (M = 4.79, SD = 1.37, N = 16) on the questionnaire (Z = -.58, p = .57). It was not possible to analyze differences in ratings between divisions, since most divisions had a very small number of respondents (as previously displayed in Table 2).

A Spearman's *rho* correlation test was conducted to test the relationship between leaders' ratings of the engagement survey as a valuable tool and leaders' composite scores of the perceived benefits of the engagement survey (the composite score is the average of all the ratings for the items in question 7 for each respondent). A Spearman's *rho* correlation test was selected for the nonparametric data. The test indicated a significant, moderate to strong, positive correlation between the variables ($r_s(50) = .65$, $p < .001$). In other words, the greater the extent leaders perceived benefits of the engagement survey, the more they perceived the survey as a valuable tool overall. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 6.

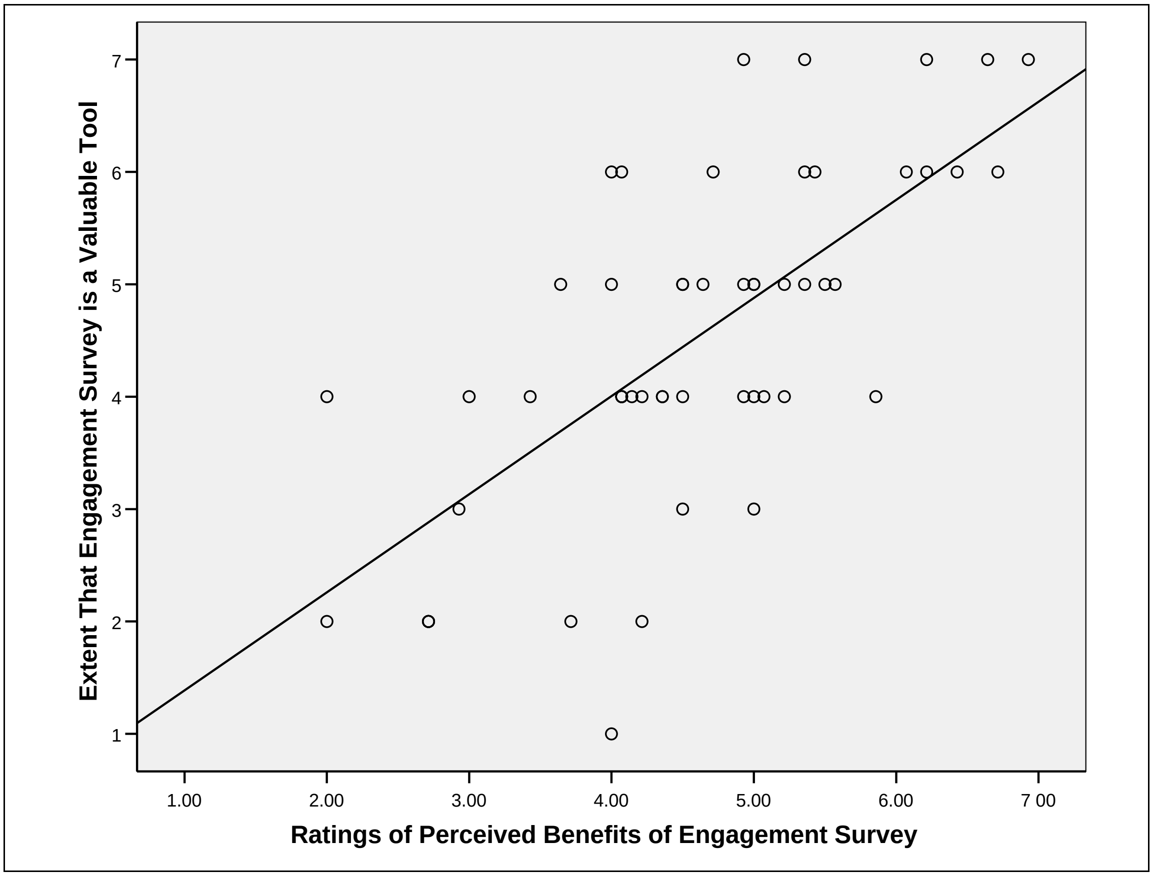

Figure 6. Extent that engagement survey is a valuable tool versus ratings of perceived benefits of engagement survey.

A Spearman's *rho* correlation test was also conducted to test the relationship between leaders' ratings of the engagement survey as a valuable tool and leaders' composite scores of the perceived barriers to using the engagement survey results (the composite score is the average of all the ratings for the items in question 8 of the questionnaire for each respondent). A Spearman's *rho* correlation test was selected for the nonparametric data. The test indicated a weak, negative correlation between the two variables ($r_s(50) = -.327$, $p < .05$). In other words, the less the leaders perceived barriers to using the engagement survey, the more useful the survey tended to be perceived overall. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 7.

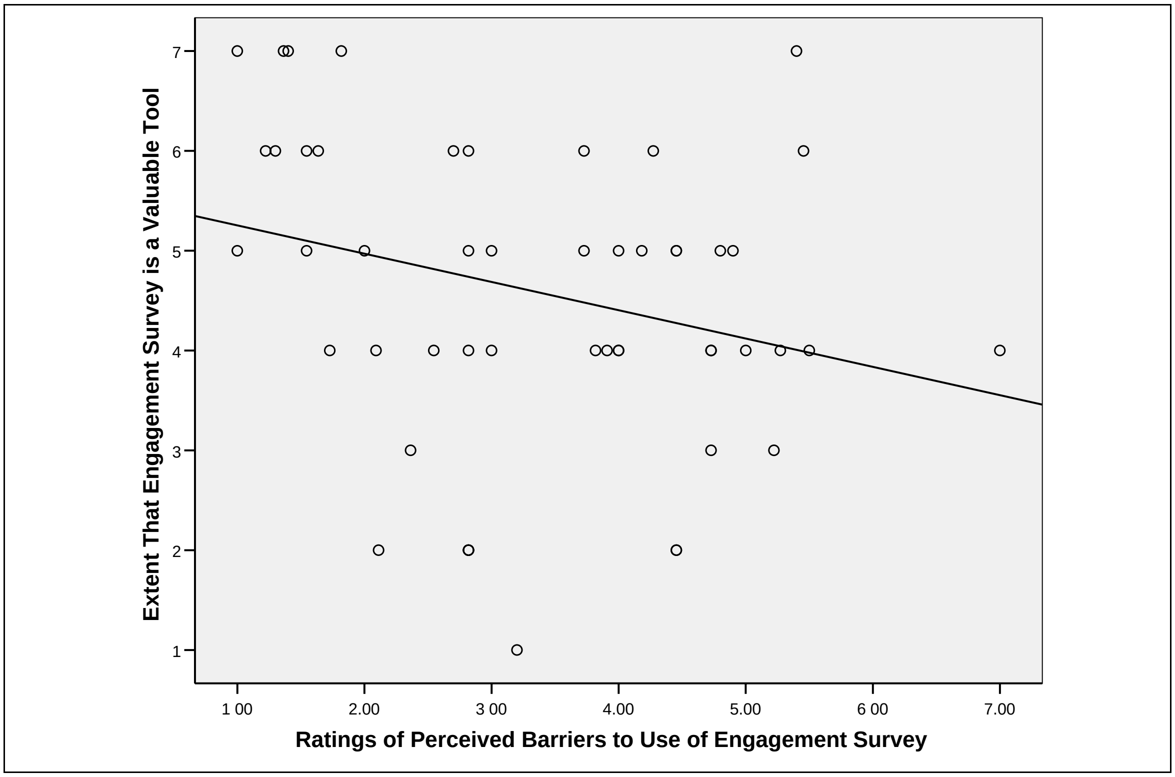

Figure 7. Extent that engagement survey is a valuable tool versus ratings of perceived barriers to using the survey.

<u>Ideas for Improving the Use of the Engagement Survey</u>

When asked in interviews how the engagement survey could be improved to increase its usefulness, many division heads made comments related to communication around the engagement survey. Below are these comments.

- We should link the survey results to specific, observable activities in the organization so employees can see its impact.

- More could be done to make employees aware of how their responses connect to specific changes in the organization.
- I think it would be good for employees to see how organizational results relate to organizational interventions.
- We should have additional communication strategies to reflect on the survey throughout the year. I think that this should be a focus throughout the year through our broad-based communication tools, which is [our company-wide newsletter], a weekly update called Management Update, and a weekly all-employee communication called News from [the president]. I would try to grab face time in each of those communications. The way it's set up right now, engagement feels more like an event than an ongoing process.

As mentioned previously, many of the division heads also suggested that the engagement survey results be made more “actionable.” Below are some of the related comments.

- I would like to be given actionable recommendations from experts. Something I can include in conversations. You know, what levers I can pull to have the greatest impact on combinations of variables.
- I'd like a manager toolkit with specific ideas for activities. Otherwise, I sometimes feel I've done everything I can think of, and then everybody gets very busy.
- It might be helpful to provide management with a planning worksheet to prompt action - a one-pager that would prompt someone to write down action items.

Other comments and questions raised by division heads are listed below.

- Research suggests that there's a connection between engagement and retention, for example. Is this connection seen in our work environment at HealthXYZ? I don't know the answer.
- It might be helpful to know what the frontline employees think of employee engagement and what they think when they answer the questions.
- We keep our response rates high by encouraging managers to talk up the survey. If management takes responsibility, you have better results.
- We increased our response rates by 20% from last year, because we sent out email reminders about the survey.
- Do the benefits of the survey outweigh the cost? I don't know. I hope someone is looking at that equation.
- It would be interesting to calculate ROI [return on investment]. After all, there's an expense to doing the survey activity. I think there's an assumption of its value, but it's never been determined in a quantifiable sense. At least not that I know of.

Suggestions for improvement provided by leaders in interviews are consistent with the barriers to using the survey, discussed earlier. Comments regarding potential improvement in areas not included on the study’s questionnaire are provided below.

- There's terminology issues. Who is "manager" on the survey? My direct supervisor? The department manager? The director? What is "team” on the survey?

- I'd like to see us encourage more comments on the survey. Comments say a lot. Sometimes number scales alone don't have a lot of meaning; I want more comments.
- It would be nice to know how we compare against other companies in our industry. I wonder, what are the common issues in our industry?

Actions Taken by Leaders as a Result of Engagement Survey Results

Interviewees in this study were asked to describe the actions they have taken in response to the engagement survey's results. In order to better understand these responses, interviewees and survey participants were asked about their accountability for taking action in response to the survey. This section provides the results for both of these items: accountability for actions in response to the engagement survey and specific actions that have been taken as a direct result of the engagement survey.

Accountability for Actions in Response to the Engagement Survey

Table 10 summarizes the extent to which leaders are held accountable for acting on the results of the engagement survey. The table is arranged for each column to be read individually.

Table 10

Extent Leaders are Held Accountable for Acting on Survey Results

Division Head Interviews	Leader Interviews	Leader Questionnaires
▪ 10 of the 11 division heads interviewed indicated that they do not explicitly hold those under them accountable for taking action in response to the engagement survey results and did not know what, specifically, was being done with the results (although all mentioned that they encourage action) ▪ 1 division head described a process in which direct reports confirm that the engagement survey results were discussed with their teams and that action items came out of those discussions	▪ 8 of 12 leaders interviewed indicated that they were not explicitly held accountable by their managers for taking action in response to the engagement survey results ▪ 4 of 12 leaders interviewed indicated that they had at least some level of accountability for taking action ▪ 3 of 12 leaders interviewed indicated that they had taken actions to strengthen engagement within their teams as a direct result of the engagement survey	▪ 29.4% of leaders surveyed reported that their boss requires them to discuss the results of the employee engagement survey with their direct reports ▪ 21.6% of leaders surveyed reported that their boss requires them to develop an action plan in response to the engagement survey results ▪ 80.4% of leaders surveyed reported taking actions to strengthen engagement within their teams as a direct result of the engagement survey

<u>Specific Actions Taken as a Direct Result of the Engagement Survey</u>

In interviews, leaders and division heads were asked about specific actions they have taken in response to engagement survey results to improve engagement on their teams. While most respondents had not personally taken such action and could not describe specific activities, below are comments from those who had.

- We put in place a very solid program to support people in the department who were studying for professional licenses or other designations. We started a process of putting a third of our division leaders through the 360 degree feedback program. We did a number of things like that to try to influence both the rational commitment and the emotional commitment dimension. One of my direct reports has done a lot in terms of employee recognition – fairly structured and recurring quarterly meetings with all employees, looking for opportunities to recognize accomplishments for individuals or departments – things of that sort. It's kind of a bunch of little things that you hope, over time, will have an impact.

- In response to the survey, we did our own follow-up surveys around how employees prefer to receive recognition and feedback. I've seen improved performance in my department from the tailored feedback I now give my employees.
- We stopped canceling meetings as often to improve communication within our group.
- As a result of survey, we implemented changes to change attitudes around innovation.
- We've made specific changes in our division around staff retention efforts and clarifying manager expectations around communication. We identified at-risk employees [for turnover] and then we identified a short list of key employees that we believed were intending to leave. In some cases we made changes to their salary. In other cases we made changes to their work environment – some people wanted to work from home more. It was very unique to the employee. We did a variety of activities like that. It wasn't a large group of employees. It was just key employees that we knew that if we lost them, it would be really painful.

- We incorporated improvement ideas into our annual objectives and development plans. We also designed onboarding activities directed toward engagement.
- We have made changes in our area in response to the survey results – we've strengthened management training and made some personnel changes.

Some interviewees also mentioned activities that stimulate engagement but are not necessarily reflected in the engagement survey results. A couple of these comments are below.

- There's several things we do as an organization to engage employees. For example, our wellness program…and we invite employees to participate in pilot projects. There's a good linkage between employees and the products to the public. Employees feel like they contributed to the products our customers use. My point is that there's more to engagement than job-specific stuff. There's other aspects of worklife where engagement takes place as well, and that's not really captured in the survey.
- We made a lot of changes in the division, but we would have made those changes anyway. We didn't make them directly because of the engagement results. We haven't made any changes as a direct result of the engagement results since. The changes we made came out of Patrick Lencioni's book – The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive, which are cohesive leadership team, visioning and clarity, over communicate clarity, and reinforce clarity through human systems.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

What Leaders Do with Engagement Survey Data

Nearly half of the leaders who responded to this study's questionnaire indicated that they receive engagement survey results by email only, while approximately one-quarter reported receiving the results via personal contact (i.e., meeting and/or one-on-one discussion with boss). Leaders who receive communication about engagement survey results through multiple forms of personal contact appeared to be more likely to view the survey as a valuable tool for strengthening engagement than those who receive communication by email only. Therefore, it is recommended that results of the employee engagement survey be communicated to leaders using multiple methods of personal contact (perhaps in addition to email). Communicating engagement survey results in this way would likely increase the perception of the survey's usefulness, and presumably, increase the likelihood that leaders will act on the results. This finding is not surprising, considering that many professionals today receive a multitude of daily emails of varying importance.

Overall, leaders tended to dedicate time to analyzing survey data themselves to some extent. Although there was a statistically significant relationship between the extent that leaders analyze engagement survey results for themselves and their perception of the engagement survey's usefulness, the relationship was very weak. Therefore, it may not be necessary to encourage independent analysis of engagement survey results on the part of leaders in an effort to increase their buy-in into the survey's usefulness. Instead, it may be more productive to focus on other efforts that would have a greater impact on perceptions of the engagement survey.

Approximately two-thirds of leaders indicated that they share the results of the engagement survey with their employees; however, perceptions of the benefit of this activity were inconsistent in this study, perhaps because of varying approaches to this conversation. The literature on organizational surveys suggests that this is a productive activity (Dunham & Smith, 1979; Edwards et al., 1997; Rossett, 1999; Smith, 2003). Therefore, a well-crafted approach to this conversation may assist leaders in maximizing the benefits of such a discussion. Dunham & Smith (1979) recommend that this discussion consist of six components: an overview of the survey and its intent, a summary of positive results, a summary of mixed results, a summary of negative results, a statement of planned actions, and an invitation to discuss what has been presented. Following this advice could potentially result in more employee suggestions for improving engagement and increased awareness and buy-in around engagement and the survey itself.

Perceptions of the Engagement Survey

On the questionnaire, mean ratings of the perceived benefits of the engagement survey ranged from 4.12 to 4.96 on a 7-point scale. While all items are at least slightly to the positive side of the scale's center point (4), there remains potential to push the perception of these benefits further up the scale into the 5 to 7 range. Since these benefits are already positively perceived by some in the organization, these same benefits could be explicitly promoted to increase awareness of engagement and buy-in into the engagement survey. There were no perceived benefits that stood out as significantly higher or lower than the rest. Therefore, HealthXYZ should prioritize benefits to build upon by determining which can be most easily addressed for the sake of achieving some quick wins in this area, as short-term gains can be an effective way to build momentum for change (Biech, 2007; Bridges, 2003; Edwards et al., 1997; Kotter, 1996).

Similarly, it is recommended that HealthXYZ take actions to decrease the presence of factors that make the engagement survey more difficult to use as a tool, to increase its use and buy-in throughout the organization. On the questionnaire, mean ratings of the perceived deterrents ranged from 2.58 to 3.83. While all are at least slightly to the lower side of the scale's center point (4), there remains a potential to push the perception of some of these deterrents further down the scale into the 1 to 2 range. Those deterrents that are already in the 2-range could be considered lower priority to address, as these were not perceived as barriers to using the engagement survey to as great of an extent as the rest. Most of the perceived deterrents were in the 3-range, and these can be prioritized by determining which can be most easily addressed for the sake of achieving some quick wins in this area. Clearly, minimizing barriers and deterrents to acting on the survey would be likely to increase leaders' ability to take action (Hiatt, 2006).

Although this study found that the perception of benefits had a stronger relationship to perceived value of the engagement survey than did perception of deterrents, it is not recommended that addressing deterrents be made a lower priority, for two reasons. First, the majority of respondents who completed this questionnaire reported having access to the survey data and reported taking actions to improve engagement. This finding may be due to a positive bias that can result when study participants have the ability to opt in or opt out of a questionnaire. In other words, leaders who tend to opt in for voluntary activities (such as completing an anonymous questionnaire) might be more likely to take action to improve engagement as well, and might therefore be more likely to have a more favorable view of the engagement survey. This study does not have the benefit of collecting the perceptions of those who opted out of the questionnaire and may not find the engagement survey useful due to a variety of potential barriers. Second, widely accepted theories of workplace motivation (e.g., Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1993) tend to suggest that negative factors (i.e., perceived deterrents) have a greater influence over motivation than do positive factors (i.e., perceived benefits).

It may be worthwhile for HealthXYZ to take actions to demonstrate the relevance of the engagement survey to leaders in lower levels of the organization. In interviews, 7 of 12 leaders suggested that the benefits of the engagement survey are primarily at the organizational level (rather than at the team level). On the questionnaire, the two top rated benefits both related to benefits that applied to the organization at large (as opposed to the team level). Therefore, demonstrating the relevance of the engagement survey to these leaders may increase their desire to act on the results (Hiatt, 2006). By extension, this increased level of buy-in may also motivate them to encourage their employees to complete the survey, potentially resulting in higher response rates.

It is recommended that HealthXYZ develop a communication strategy that connects the engagement survey to positive changes throughout the organization. In interviews, 7 of 12 leaders indicated a lack of belief that engagement survey results are used to make changes in the organization. Division heads also recognized this disconnect and recommended communication strategies that tie changes in the organization to the engagement survey (e.g., the weekly email sent to all employees from the CEO, the weekly update to all company managers, the monthly print newsletter all employees receive, etc.). This recommendation is a common aspect of the reinforcement component of many change models (e.g., Biech, 2007; Bridges, 2003; Hiatt, 2006). Furthermore, sharing such positive changes would likely facilitate an exchange of ideas regarding what actions can be taken to improve engagement. A well-crafted communication strategy that publicizes positive change, promotes engagement survey benefits, and addresses barriers/deterrents could have a positive impact on engagement and perceptions of the engagement survey.

Actions Taken by Leaders as a Result of Engagement Survey Results

Interestingly, the relationship between accountability and taking action in response to the engagement survey was inconsistent within this study and might be an area for further exploration within similar studies. In interviews, a relatively low proportion of leaders indicated that they were held accountable for taking action in response to the engagement survey results. Not surprisingly, a low proportion of these leaders reported taking action. On the questionnaire, a relatively low proportion of leaders indicated that they were held accountable for taking action in response to the engagement survey results; however, a large proportion of leaders indicated taking action. This inconsistency might be explained by differences in these leaders' participation in the study. Interviewees received personalized email invitations to participate in interviews. Although their responses were kept confidential, their identities were not anonymous to the researcher. In contrast, questionnaire respondents were invited to participate via a mass email, which allowed them to anonymously opt in or opt out of the questionnaire. Perhaps those who opted in (51.5% of the invited sample) have a tendency to be more engaged in workplace activities, even when such activities are optional. This tendency would introduce a positive bias (which was also described earlier) into the survey results, potentially making it appear that a larger proportion of leaders take action than what actually occurs in the full population.

To address a leading theme from the interviews with division heads, steps should be taken to make the results of the engagement survey “actionable” at the organizational and team levels. Eight of the division heads identified a lack of “actionable” ideas as a barrier to using the engagement survey results to enhance engagement in their divisions. This is consistent with the findings of Catteeuw et al. (2007) in their employee engagement initiative at Johnson & Johnson Pharmaceutical Research & Development, L.L.C. in which leaders informed the researchers that they wanted “clarity, guidance, and choices,” prompting the company to create “actions menus” that leaders can utilize in developing their customized approach to enhancing engagement (p. 155). HealthXYZ could address their leaders’ desire for “actionable” ideas through a variety of means, such as providing leaders with a toolkit of ideas for addressing specific areas on the engagement survey, creating a community of practice for leaders to share ideas for enhancing engagement, and providing leaders with a worksheet or planning template to guide brainstorming tactics for enhancing engagement. From a change management perspective, such “actionable” resources would likely help to move leaders through the knowledge and ability phases of the change (Hiatt, 2006).

Overall Conclusions

The primary recommendation from this study is for HealthXYZ to create a comprehensive communication plan around their employee engagement initiative. Such a communication plan should include:

- How to communicate the engagement survey results down the organization’s ranks of leaders (as well as what to communicate)
- How leaders should communicate engagement survey results to frontline employees (i.e., non-leadership direct reports)
- Targeted, “actionable” recommendations that can be used to respond to the engagement survey results to enhance engagement within divisions and teams
- A year-round plan for integrating the communication of positive changes resulting from the engagement survey into routine communications throughout the organization

This communication plan should be designed in a way that:

- Builds on the perceived benefits of the engagement survey
- Addresses (and decreases) the perceived barriers to using the engagement survey results
- Demonstrates the relevance of employee engagement and the survey itself to leaders and their teams

- Connects the engagement survey to positive change in the organization for employees of all levels
- Integrates the topic of engagement into routine communications throughout the year to increase the perception of engagement as an ongoing priority and a core component of HealthXYZ culture

Limitations of the Study

A significant limitation of this study is the fact that the researcher was not an employee of HealthXYZ during the time in which the study took place. This created a strong dependence on an internal liaison and other internal representatives to execute many of the tasks that supported the study (e.g., emailing invitations to participate, encouraging participation, coordinating interview schedules, negotiating data collection methods with upper-management, etc.). This not only caused the study to progress more slowly, but it also left the researcher with a lesser degree of control over how supporting tasks were carried out.

Due to HealthXYZ’s geographically dispersed workforce, all interviews were conducted by phone. The main drawbacks of interviews conducted by phone are the inability to observe interviewees in their organizational surroundings (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001) and the inability to observe interviewees’ nonverbal cues (Gupta, Sleezer, & Russ-Eft, 2007). Although phone interviews offer the advantage of not having to exclude possible interviewees due to physical location, the disadvantages function as limitations to this study.

One limitation of any study (including this one) is the inability to collect data from those who do not participate. All but one of those invited to participate in interviews opted to do so – the one potential interviewee who did not participate was on medical leave at the time of the study. The response rate for the questionnaire was 51.5%, which may have introduced a positive bias into the questionnaire's findings, as discussed earlier. This suggests that some of the questionnaire's results could have potentially turned out quite differently if everyone were somehow required to respond (and could still do so anonymously).

Another limitation related to the study's questionnaire is the unexpected increase in workload experienced by a large proportion of HealthXYZ just before the questionnaire was scheduled to be administered. As described in the Methods chapter, the researcher originally planned to invite the entire study population to complete the questionnaire. However, division heads requested that questionnaire participation be scaled back (to a sample of approximately 40% of the population) so that less time would be spent on it across the workforce to accommodate the increased workloads and overtime hours that were occurring as a result of a troubled information technology initiative. These events may have affected the moods of the questionnaire participants, which could have influenced their responses in terms of the amount of time spent contemplating each item on the questionnaire as well as the actual responses given. These events may have also affected the questionnaire's response rate (of 51.5%).

Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research should replicate this study with another organization and its annual employee engagement survey to test the transportability of the findings and recommendations presented in this report. As an evaluation study within a single organization, the findings presented here are very context-specific. Despite this, the recommendations drawn from the study's findings are consistent with what has been presented by other researchers. This suggests a strong likelihood that the recommendations offered in this report would be productive for other organizations that conduct annual engagement surveys. Furthermore, this research should also be replicated with other types of organizational surveys to determine the transportability of the findings and recommendations to other survey types.

If this study were replicated with another organization, additional insights could be uncovered by conducting a follow-up study of that organization (perhaps a year later) to determine the effectiveness of the recommendations from the original study. Such a follow-up study could answer questions such as:

- Which recommendations were acted upon? Why?
- How were the recommendations executed?
- How effective were the recommendations?
- For those that were ineffective, what could have been done to increase their likelihood of success? For those that were effective, what were the keys to success?
- What unexpected circumstances emerged when addressing the recommendations?

- Reflecting on the original study, what aspect(s) of the recommendations should be changed?

Another study of this nature could attempt to more closely examine the relationship between the presence of accountability for taking action in response to survey results and the tendency to actually take action. In this study, the findings in this area were inconsistent, potentially due to a possible positive bias in questionnaire responses, as previously described. Future research could measure these variables in other ways in an attempt to develop more concrete conclusions.

A future study like this one could incorporate a formal analysis of relevant extant data within the organization. While extant data were informally reviewed by the researcher prior to designing this evaluation study, these data were not formally included in the analysis for the study. Extant data analysis can yield additional research questions and highlight potential answers to those questions that data collection could be designed to potentially corroborate. Such triangulation would strengthen a study's conclusions.

Future researchers attempting to replicate this study should also consider collecting data from frontline employees in the organization. This would serve to corroborate the data collected from leaders of the study's organization. That is, it would allow the researcher to verify with employees whether they have observed the benefits and actions that the organization's leaders indicate. In the event that data collected from employees contrasts with that from other data sources, this could potentially point to other issues in the organization, which would warrant additional research.

A Final Note

Not surprisingly, this study's findings are consistent with the overall idea presented by Gilbert (1978) that performance problems and opportunities are more likely to be effectively addressed through interventions that apply to the workplace, as opposed to interventions that apply directly to an employee on a personal level. This is reinforced by Dean's (1997) research, in which he asked a large number of workers in many different types of jobs what they thought was the biggest block to their performance. Respondents identified factors related to the work environment 75% of the time, with 25% of the responses relating to personal factors. In referring to Gilbert's (1978) behavior engineering model, the vast majority of the findings and recommendations here would be categorized as needs related to information, tools, and resources. In contrast, none of the leaders who participated in this study indicated that they did not understand the concept of employee engagement (knowledge/skills), and there was no evidence that HealthXYZ leaders lack the capacity or personal motivation to use the results of the engagement survey to enhance engagement on their teams. Without this study, some may have been tempted to suggest that the easiest way to get leaders to take more action in response to the engagement survey is to provide them with training. While that may have had some positive influence, following the recommendations provided by this study will likely help HealthXYZ to more effectively address the root causes related to acting on the engagement survey and yield greater results.

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APPENDIX A

Email Invitation Sent to Leaders to Participate in Interviews

Email Subject Line
Interview Regarding Annual Engagement Survey

Email Body
Hi [NAME] ~

You are invited to participate in an interview regarding the annual engagement survey that is conducted at HealthXYZ. **Your proposed interview time is [DATE] from [START TIME] to [END TIME]**.

The purpose of the interview is to give you an opportunity to confidentially discuss your opinions and uses of the employee engagement survey and its results, so that HealthXYZ can improve the company's use of the survey. The interview will be conducted by phone by Shelley Berg, a master's of Instructional & Performance Technology student at Boise State University. Shelley was an intern in the Organizational Development (OD) department last summer, and she will be working with OD to make recommendations for how the employee engagement survey and its results can be best utilized throughout HealthXYZ. This project is approved by the OD department at HealthXYZ and by Boise State University.

Please confirm whether the proposed interview time will work for you by emailing Shelley at ShelleyBerg@mail.boisestate.edu by [DATE]. If the proposed time will not work for you, please suggest a different time in your email. Your positive response to this email will serve as your consent to participate in the project. The interviews will be recorded (with your permission), and Shelley will call you at your desk (or an alternative location of your choice) at the scheduled time. The interview is expected to last up to 45 minutes.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, your responses will be kept confidential, and you can opt not to answer any individual question during the interview. If you have any questions or concerns you'd like to discuss with Shelley, feel free to contact her via the email above or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. Additional information about the project is attached.

Thanks for your participation!

[EMAIL SIGNATURE OF SENDER]

APPENDIX B

Email Invitation Sent to Division Heads to Participate in Interviews

<u>Email Subject Line</u>
Interview Regarding Annual Engagement Survey

<u>Email Body</u>
Hi [NAME] ~

You are invited to participate in an interview regarding the annual engagement survey that is conducted at HealthXYZ. **Your proposed interview time is [DATE] from [START TIME] to [END TIME]**.

The purpose of the interview is to give you an opportunity to confidentially discuss (1) your opinions of the employee engagement survey and its results, and (2) how you communicate the results to your direct reports, so that HealthXYZ can improve the company's use of the survey. The interview will be conducted by phone by Shelley Berg, a master's of Instructional & Performance Technology student at Boise State University. Shelley was an intern in the Organizational Development (OD) department last summer, and she will be working with OD to make recommendations for how the employee engagement survey and its results can be best utilized throughout HealthXYZ. This project is approved by the OD department at HealthXYZ and by Boise State University.

Please confirm whether the proposed interview time will work for you by emailing Shelley at <u>ShelleyBerg@mail.boisestate.edu</u> by [DATE]. If the proposed time will not work for you, please suggest a different time in your email. Your positive response to this email will serve as your consent to participate in this project. The interviews will be recorded (with your permission), and Shelley will call you at your desk (or an alternative location of your choice) at the scheduled time. The interview is expected to last up to 45 minutes.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary, your responses will be kept confidential, and you can opt not to answer any individual question during the interview. If you have any questions or concerns you'd like to discuss with Shelley, feel free to contact her via the email above or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx. Additional information about this project is attached.

Thanks for your participation!

[EMAIL SIGNATURE OF SENDER]

APPENDIX C

Email Invitation Sent to Leaders to Participate in Online Survey

Email Subject Line
Brief Questionnaire Regarding Annual Engagement Survey – takes 5 minutes

Email Body
Hello ~

You are invited to take a 5-minute online survey about your opinions of the annual engagement survey conducted at HealthXYZ. The survey can be accessed via this link: [WEB LINK HERE].

The purpose of today's survey is to give you an opportunity to anonymously and confidentially share your opinions and uses of the employee engagement survey and its results, so that HealthXYZ can assess the company's use of the survey. A copy of the annual engagement survey is attached for your reference. This research is being conducted by Shelley Berg, a master's student in Instructional & Performance Technology at Boise State University. Shelley was an intern in the Organizational Development (OD) department last summer. As part of her thesis research, Shelley is working with OD to understand how the results of the annual employee engagement survey at HealthXYZ are communicated and can be best utilized throughout the organization. This research project has been approved by the OD department at HealthXYZ and Boise State University's research review board.

To thank you for the time you spend completing the survey, you will receive professional development resources after the survey. Are you interested in improving employee performance? Would you like to learn more about employee learning on the job? Upon submitting your completed survey, the survey confirmation page will direct you to resources on these and other topics that are often of interest to those in leadership roles.

The survey will be accessible through [DATE]. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and your identity will be anonymous. Completing this survey will serve as your voluntary consent to participate in this project. If you have any questions or concerns you'd like to discuss with Shelley about this survey, feel free to contact her via email at ShelleyAnnBerg@yahoo.com or by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

Thanks for your participation!

[EMAIL SIGNATURE OF SENDER]

APPENDIX D

Questionnaire Used for this Research

This research is being conducted by Shelley Berg, a master's student at Boise State University and a former intern in the Organizational Development department at HealthXYZ. The study has been approved by HealthXYZ and Boise State University for Shelley's thesis research. The purpose of her research is to understand how the results of the annual employee engagement survey at HealthXYZ can be best utilized throughout the organization. Your participation in this research is optional, and your responses will be kept confidential and anonymous. You may skip any item on this survey or stop participation at any time. If you have any questions, feel free to contact Shelley at [redacted].

To thank you for your time, you will be taken to a page that contains professional development links upon submitting this survey.

This survey should take approximately 5 minutes to complete. Click here to see a copy of the employee engagement survey.

1. In which division do you work? Select Division

2. What is your position? Select the title from the drop-menu that best fits your position. Select Position

3. How is your team's employee engagement survey results communicated to you? Check all that apply.

   - ☐ Via email
   - ☐ In a meeting with others
   - ☐ In a one-on-one conversation with my boss
   - ☐ They're not communicated with me (If you select this box, you do not need to complete the rest of the survey. Simply click the "Submit" button at the bottom of this page.)

4. To what extent do you analyze the employee engagement survey data yourself to develop your own conclusions?

I do not review the data at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	I dedicate time to review all the data
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	

5. Which of the following statements below are true for you? Check all that apply.

- ☐ My boss requires me to discuss the results of the employee engagement survey with my direct reports.
- ☐ My boss requires me to develop an action plan, for taking actions in my team in response to the results of the employee engagement survey.
- ☐ I have taken actions to strengthen engagement within my team as a direct results of the employee engagement survey.

6. To what extent is discussing the results of the employee engagement survey with your direct reports a valuable activity?

Not at all valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Extremely valuable
	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	
☐	Check this box if you do not discuss the results of the employee engagement survey with your direct reports.							

7. To what extent do you agree that each of the items below is a benefit of the employee engagement survey?

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
a. It has helped me to better understand the concept of employee engagement.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
b. It helps me to gauge the level of engagement on my team of direct reports.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
c. It helps me to identify existing strengths and opportunities for improvement within my team.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
d. It helps me to identify actions I can take to strengthen engagement within my team.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
e. It helps me to be more sensitive to employee engagement issues.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
f. It validates the effectiveness of engagement-oriented activities I'm already doing.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
g. It prompts discussion between my direct reports and me.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
h. Discussions about the survey's results strengthen employees' commitment to HealthXYZ.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
i. The survey results allow me to see how my team's engagement compares to that of HealthXYZ as a whole.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
j. The survey results help management to gauge the level of engagement for HealthXYZ as a whole.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree
k. The survey results help management to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement for HealthXYZ as a whole.	Strongly Disagree	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Strongly Agree

l. The survey results help management to identify actions that they can take to strengthen engagement for HealthXYZ as a whole.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
m. Positive changes have been implemented at HealthXYZ because of the employee engagement survey and its results.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree
n. The survey results help HealthXYZ to achieve its objectives as a company.	Strongly Disagree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Strongly Agree

8. The aim of the employee engagement survey is to function as a tool that leaders at HealthXYZ can use to help them strengthen engagement on their teams.

   What makes it difficult for you to use the results of the employee engagement survey? Please rate your level of agreement with each statement below.

   N/A = This item does not apply to me.

a. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because I do not receive results that are specific to my direct reports**.

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true	N/A

b. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because I do not see raw numbers from the survey results.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true	N/A

c. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because it is not a useful tool for gauging engagement on my team.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true

d. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because I am not held accountable for taking action.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true	N/A

e. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because I am not sure what actions to take to strengthen engagement on my team.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

f. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because I am not sure how to take advantage of the survey and its results.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

g. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because the scores for my team are good; therefore I do not need to take action.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true	N/A
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐		☐

h. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because we get too many surveys.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

i. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because I do not receive results timely enough to be meaningful.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

j. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because I see the survey as being more of a tool for the organization as a whole than for me.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

k. It is **difficult** to use the survey results **because I don't think others are using the results to make changes.**

Not true at all	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Absolutely true
	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	

9. The aim of the employee engagement survey is to function as a tool that leaders at HealthXYZ can use to help them strengthen engagement on their teams.

   To what extent do you agree that the employee engagement survey is a valuable tool for this?

Not at all valuable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Extremely valuable

10. Feel free to share any additional comments about the employee engagement survey in the space below.

Thanks for taking the time to complete this survey! Please click the "Submit" button to continue. Upon clicking "Submit," you will be directed to a page that provides links to professional development resources.

APPENDIX E

Project Proposal Agreement with the Client Organization

Thesis at [redacted] Project Proposal

<u>Overview of the Opportunity</u>

For the past few years, [redacted] has administered an annual employee engagement survey to its workforce. Employee engagement has been tied to organizational issues such as turnover, productivity, and overall job performance. Thus, an “engaged” workforce will likely have a desirable impact on these, and other, organizational issues.

Currently, a consulting firm collects and analyzes the employee engagement survey data and provides that information to the organizational development (OD) department at [redacted]. After doing their own analysis of the data, OD communicates the results directly to the 12 business partners to HR (which are representatives from each of the company’s 12 divisions). It is then up to the business partners to diffuse the information, as they see fit, to the leaders throughout their respective divisions. How this information is communicated to frontline leaders, and how this information is used, is not communicated back to OD.

Given the current situation and Shelley’s need to conduct thesis research, there exists an opportunity to have Shelley examine what happens with engagement survey data after it is provided to the business partners. Such an examination will provide OD with insights into the perceived usefulness of the engagement survey among [redacted] leadership, what actions are taken as a result of the survey findings, and the factors that influence these perceptions and actions. This will result in a set of recommendations to help ensure that the usefulness of the engagement survey is maximized and action is taken as a result of the survey results.

<u>Purpose and Scope</u>

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to explore management perceptions and uses of the employee engagement survey findings at [redacted], and to make recommendations for future actions to improve organizational performance.

Research questions

- How do frontline leaders and business partners perceive the usefulness of the employee engagement survey?
- What do frontline leaders and business partners do with the information collected from the survey?
  For instance: Do they attempt to interpret the results? Do they discuss the results with others? Do they brainstorm potential actions? Why or why not?
- What actions, if any, do frontline leaders take as a result of the data? Why?

Research participants
The target population for this research will be the HR business partners and frontline leaders.

The 12 business partners to HR will be included because of their gatekeeper role with the survey findings.

Frontline leaders are defined as those who supervise non-management employees. They will be included because they are the leaders that would likely play the most significant role in implementing any changes that result from the survey findings. There are approximately 500 frontline leaders at [redacted].

Overview of Approach
The following outlines the basic steps involved in completing this project once this initial proposal has been given the go-ahead:

- Develop the interview documents
  Shelley will develop interview guides and related correspondence documents (i.e. invitation and explanatory emails/memos) with input from [redacted] and potentially others within OD.

- Obtain IRB approval
  Shelley will obtain Institutional Review Board approval from Boise State University to conduct the research.

- Conduct interviews
  Shelley will conduct phone interviews with the business partners and a quota sample of 12 out of the approximately 500 frontline leaders (this means that interviewees will be selected specifically for variety – e.g. one from each division, inclusion of males and females, varying tenures with [redacted], etc.). Interviews are expected to last approximately 45 minutes each. The purpose of these interviews is to identify common themes that arise in addressing the project's research questions. These themes will be used in developing an online survey. Interviews will be audio recorded; however, consent will be obtained from each interviewee prior to recording.

- Develop online survey documents
  Shelley will develop an online survey (based on the data collected from interviews) and an invitation email, with input from [redacted] and potentially others within OD. This survey will be brief (requiring approximately five minutes to complete), and its purpose is to determine whether themes that arose in interviews apply to the broader group.

- Test online survey
  The survey will be placed on a Boise State University website, external to

[redacted]. Therefore, testing will be necessary to ensure that [redacted] leaders have access to it. Since Shelley is external to [redacted], testing would be coordinated primarily by [redacted].

- Conduct online survey
  Frontline managers will be invited via email to take a brief online survey that measures their perceptions of the employee engagement survey at [redacted].

- Develop the interview documents
  Shelley will develop interview guides and related correspondence documents (i.e. invitation and explanatory emails/memos) with input from [redacted] and potentially others within OD.

- Conduct interviews
  Shelley will conduct phone interviews with a quota sample of 12 out of the approximately 500 frontline leaders. Interviews are expected to last approximately 45 minutes each. The purpose of these interviews is to delve more deeply into themes that emerged in the previous set of interviews and the online survey. Interviews will be audio recorded; however, consent will be obtained from each interviewee prior to recording.

- Analyze and interpret data
  Shelley will analyze and interpret all the data collected from the interviews and online survey. [redacted], and potentially others in OD, will be invited to comment and provide input on the data analysis.

- Produce final report for [redacted]
  Shelley will write a report for [redacted] on the research, which outlines the research methodology, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This will be made available to [redacted], and potentially others in OD, for review and input before producing a final product.

- Produce final report & present research for Boise State University
  Shelley will write a comprehensive academic report and publicly present the research to meet the Boise State University thesis requirements.

Project Timeline

Below is a tentative, *approximate* timeline of the project's primary tasks. This timeline may need to be revised early in the process, depending on the amount of time needed to obtain approval from [redacted] and Boise State University to pursue this research.

Activity	Approximate Timeframe
Develop interview guides – round 1	October-November 2007
IRB approval	November 2007-January 2008
Conduct interviews – round 1	January-March
Develop online survey	March

Test online survey	March
Conduct online survey	March-April
Develop interview guide – round 2	April
Conduct interviews – round 2	May-June
Analyze and interpret data	June-July
Provide finished written report for [redacted]	August
Provide finished written report for BSU	Fall 2008

<u>Assumptions (A), Risks (R), Obstacles (O)</u>
A – Shelley will be given full access to engagement survey data and related reports
A – [redacted] will be able to obtain a current list of all the business partners and frontline leaders to provide to Shelley
A – Shelley will have access to business partners and frontline leaders for an online survey and phone interviews
A – [redacted] (and potentially others in OD) will be available to provide input for the design of the research tools, sampling decisions, the data analysis, and the final report (although the primary responsibility for these tasks would rest with Shelley)
A – [redacted] will be available to serve as Shelley's main contact inside [redacted] for this project

R – Potential lack of availability of business partners and frontline leaders to participate in the study's activities
R – Low response rate on survey
R – Potential resistance of business partners and frontline leaders to participate
R – The need to gain approval for this project at [redacted] and Boise State University may cause early delays

O – Shelley's position as external to [redacted] may make communication more challenging
O – Geographical separation between Shelley and OD will likely prevent face-to-face meetings

<u>Resource Summary</u>
Below is a list of the resources that [redacted] will need to invest in this project:

- OD support time (mainly [redacted]), which will be used to (1) provide input into the development of the project's research tools, sampling procedures, data analysis, and final report; (2) obtain and provide relevant data for Shelley (e.g. engagement survey data, names of business partners and frontline leaders, etc.); and (3) coordinate the testing of the online survey
- Participant survey time (10-15 minutes per participant)
- Participant interview time (approximately 45 minutes each – 12 business partners and 24 frontline leaders)

<u>Overview of Communication Plan</u>

What	Who	How
Input into research and reporting activities	Shelley & [redacted]	Email, phone
Brief explanation of study and interviews	[redacted] to send to business partners and frontline leaders	Email
Invitation to participate in interviews	Shelley to contact business partners and frontline leaders	Email, possible phone follow-up
Interviews	Shelley with business partners and frontline leaders	Phone
Invitation to take online survey	[redacted] (or someone else internal) to send to business partners and frontline leaders	Email
Final report	Shelley to provide to [redacted]	TBD – potentially in writing and by phone

<u>Other Considerations</u>

Below is a list of additional items that [redacted] will need to consider in agreeing to support this research:

- **This research will be published and publicly presented within Boise State University**. The final academic report will be published by Boise State University and made publicly available in its library. The research will also be publicly presented on campus. It is not required that [redacted] be mentioned by name; however, a description of the company (e.g. number of employees, geographic location, industry, etc.) will be required. This description should be agreed upon in advance, if necessary.

- **This research will likely result in additional publications in professional journals and presentations at professional conferences**. As with the previous bullet, it is not required that [redacted] be mentioned by name; however, a description will be required.

- **The raw data collected in this research will be shared with Shelley's thesis committee**, which will serve as a guide in the analysis process. This committee will consist of three faculty members from the Instructional & Performance Technology department at Boise State University. Confidentiality agreements may be signed by Shelley and her committee, if needed.

3. <u>Confidentiality</u>.

(a) "Confidential Information" means any information about [redacted] ("[redacted]") and/or its affiliates and subsidiaries that derives actual or potential economic value from not being generally known to, and not being readily ascertainable by proper means by, persons who can obtain economic value from its disclosure or use. Without limiting the generality of the foregoing, Confidential Information includes all non-public information about [redacted] and its parents, affiliates and subsidiaries and their employees, their business activities and plans, and their business relationships.

(b) Shelley acknowledges and agrees that all Confidential Information disclosed by [redacted] pursuant to this Agreement is confidential and proprietary . Except as otherwise provided above with regard to de-identified data and information and the publication of such de-identified data and information in connection with the final academic report referenced above, Shelley will not use any Confidential Information during the term of this Agreement or thereafter for any purpose other than as permitted or required for the performance of their obligations under this Agreement. Shelley will not disclose or provide any Confidential Information to any third party, except as expressly authorized in this Agreement.

(c) The foregoing obligations and restrictions do not require Shelley to protect any information that: (i) was known or readily ascertainable by proper means before being disclosed; (ii) is or becomes available to the general public without fault or action of either Party; (iii) is lawfully disclosed to either Party by a third party who is under no obligation of confidentiality to either Party with respect to such information; (iv) is developed independently by Shelley without reference to or use of the Confidential Information; or (v) is required to be disclosed by or to a government authority.

4. Ownership Of Survey Data

Shelley agrees that all survey data and related information collected prepared or originated by in connection with this Thesis project or by any personnel performing services on her behalf in connection with this Agreement, whether before or after the execution of this Agreement, will be subject to protection under federal copyright law, constitutes "work for hire," all rights of which shall be and are owned exclusively by [redacted]; and, in any event, Shelley assigns to [redacted] all right, title, and interest, whether by way of copyright, trade secret, or otherwise, in all such data and information, whether or not it is subject to copyright laws. Within thirty (30) days of the conclusion of this thesis project, Shelley will return (or at [redacted] instruction, destroy) all copies of any data and information collected in connection with this project, in whatever form, to [redacted].

I would be happy to discuss the details of this proposal by phone ([redacted]) or email ([redacted]).

If you are prepared to consent to the proposed project as described in this document, please sign below and fax this page to the attention of Shelley Berg at (208) 426-1970.

As a representative of [redacted], I approve the conduct of the proposed research project as it is presented in this document.

Signature	Date

Printed Name and Title